



National Trust *for* Historic Preservation  
**African American**  
Cultural Heritage Action Fund

# PERSPECTIVES OF NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

## Case Studies from the 2018 African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund Research Fellows



Akilah Favors, Jeran Herbert, Ni'Shele Jackson, Kaelyn Rodriguez,  
Shaonta' Allen, Emily Junker, Stephanie Jones, Julia Cohen,  
TK Smith, and Theodore Wilhite

**NATIONAL TRUST FOR  
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October 2020



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National Trust for Historic Preservation  
**African American**  
Cultural Heritage Action Fund

The **African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund** is a multi-year initiative led by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in partnership with the Ford Foundation, The JPB Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and other partners, working to make an important and lasting contribution to our cultural landscape by elevating the stories and places of African American achievement and activism.

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The **Jessie Ball duPont Fund** is a private foundation that works to expand access to opportunity and create inclusive growth for the people, organizations and communities that Jessie Ball duPont knew and loved. We envision a world in which every member of those communities feels they belong. We focus on creating places where all are welcome, and breaking down barriers to opportunities for people who have been historically excluded.

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# INTRODUCTION

BY JENNA DUBLIN

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund has launched a research-based campaign to examine the intersection of historic preservation, the built environment, and equitable development in African American neighborhoods across the United States.

Over the past two years, the Action Fund awarded more than \$2 million to organizations that preserve historically significant places of African American experience, activism, and achievement to elevate stories of national impact, many of which were previously untold and erased from historical records or unacknowledged by the preservation movement. In many instances the Action Fund supports existing preservation efforts, such as restoration of the 17th-century African Meeting House in Boston. In others, like the Historic Westside neighborhood in Las Vegas, the Action Fund is helping local leaders build upon the community's own ways of preserving the cultural value of everyday places, and supporting the first comprehensive historic resource survey and local historic district designation in the community.

As historic preservation becomes more inclusive of diverse histories and places, we need to intentionally consider, through deep listening and collaboration, whether current approaches to preservation adequately serve the needs of diverse communities. African American neighborhoods are unique places in their own right; rich in social and cultural life and they, unlike other neighborhoods, are distinctly forged by systems of racial segregation and discrimination that have made them disproportionately vulnerable.

Today, legacies of inequality are still unfolding. In strong market cities where demand is growing, previously marginalized African American neighborhoods are becoming hotspots for development. While this growth has brought new prosperity and investment to some, it has also stoked grave concern that it will lead to diminishing affordability, displacement, and demolition of places that reflect the African American experience. Much work needs to be done to gain a deeper understanding of the complex intersections between the built environment and racial justice, and of preservation's role in bending neighborhood change towards greater justice and equity.



Therefore, this research campaign seeks to explore the complex issues of neighborhood change and how the tools and capacities of the preservation movement can help create more equitable neighborhoods in African American communities, beginning with a closer look at African American neighborhoods in 10 cities where the National Trust is working across the country: Atlanta, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; Chicago, Illinois; Los Angeles, California; Louisville, Kentucky; New York, New York; Oakland, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; St. Louis, Missouri; and Washington, D.C. This research involves data analysis, interviews, and case study research. We are gathering the knowledge of local preservation partners and drawing upon existing scholarship that demonstrates preservation at work for broader goals of social, economic, and environmental equity.

## PERSPECTIVES OF NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

When historic preservation and neighborhood change are viewed only from perspectives of the powerful, we miss out on local perspectives, nuance, and complexity. To address this, in the summer of 2018, ten students at universities across the U.S. were selected as AACHAF Research Fellows from a competitive pool of applicants and were commissioned to research and write essays on neighborhood change and historic preservation in each of the ten study cities. The Fellows, who range from undergraduate to doctoral students in sociology, urban planning, American studies, and historic preservation, developed their own approaches to examine African American neighborhoods of their choice in each of the study cities. The ten Research Fellows are: Akilah Favors (Atlanta), Jeran Herbert (Birmingham), Ni'Shele Jackson (Chicago), Kaelyn Rodriguez (Los Angeles), Shaonta' Allen (Louisville), Emily Junker (New York City), Stephanie Jones (Oakland), Julia Cohen (Philadelphia), TK Smith (St. Louis), and Theodore Wilhite (Washington D.C.)

The result is this collection of essays, “*Perspectives of Neighborhood Change*,” that range in orientation but together highlight a variety of voices and perspectives. Some of the case studies focus more closely on historic preservation. For example, Research Fellow **Ni'Shele Jackson** examines the roles of culture and preservation in anti-gentrification activism in the Woodlawn and Bronzeville neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side. **TK Smith's** case study of St. Louis elevates residents' and local historians' accounts of two African American communities that once existed named Mill Creek Valley and Laclede Town, but were demolished during urban renewal and now referred to as Midtown. TK finds that as large-scale demolitions continue in the city, public commemoration and place making are powerful tools for re-establishing black presence and agency in urban space. Focusing on the neighborhoods of Mantua and East Parkside in Philadelphia, **Julia Cohen's** research explores the roles of vacancy, community organizing, and historic preservation in the unique contexts of these neighborhoods.

Others took a broader scope to capture a moment in time and the dynamics of diverse actors. In **Akilah Favors's** study of two Atlanta Westside neighborhoods, the Atlanta



University Center and Ashview Heights, she found that perceptions of new transit investments and accompanying waves of development vary greatly among African American residents as renters or homeowners. **Emily Junker** examines how older co-op buildings created by a special program in New York City and maintained independently by residents may provide housing security in Harlem amid gentrification.

Their essays also challenged some of our own assumptions about patterns of neighborhood change and opened up potential new research directions. Research Fellow **Shaonta' Allen** finds out what residents think about the future of Louisville's West End neighborhood and most say that gentrification and economic displacement do not accurately describe current dynamics of change. The "noise" of gentrification discussions is drowning out the more pressing issues of vacancy and neglect in a city still racially divided. Allen's interviewees in Louisville demonstrate that although economic displacement is not happening now, West End residents are experiencing cultural and social displacement long before market forces make their current homes unaffordable. Neighborhood change by historical patterns of disinvestment is also captured by **Jeran Herbert's** study of Birmingham. Herbert interviewed local economic development practitioners to find that unlike other study cities, the challenges that residents face are due to vacant and deteriorating properties that may prime large scale demolition and neighborhood clearance, rather than rising housing prices.

The views, opinions, and interpretations expressed in this compendium are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the National Trust. They are powerful and insightful in their own right. As a result of these perspectives, we've committed to investigating the concept of cultural displacement, and to more clearly recognize that disinvestment and gentrification are often two sides of the same cycle of change.

The lens of African American experience has also afforded us unique insights into neighborhood change—namely, that changes in neighborhoods' social and economic characteristics are not the "natural" consequences of competition and residents' preferences. Rather, neighborhood change is often the result of policies and decisions made outside of communities, which means there are opportunities to make these processes more equitable.

Overall, the work of the Research Fellows demonstrates that when fading historical, cultural, and aesthetic assets of neighborhoods are preserved, their protection fosters close attachments to place which can empower communities to organize and fight for equity in representation, ownership, and the power to stay if they choose.

**JENNA DUBLIN** is a PhD Candidate of Urban Planning at Columbia University. Her research examines how and why community-based groups utilize historic district designation as a means to affect neighborhood trends of socioeconomic change and gentrification. Currently, she works as a consultant at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's department of Research and Development.

# Reviving the Black Mecca Along the Atlanta BeltLine from the Bottom Up

BY AKILAH FAVORS

The BeltLine's mission to revive Atlanta's historic railroad corridors provides an opportunity for the city of Atlanta to equitably revitalize and empower disenfranchised black neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup> Historically black neighborhoods along the recently completed Eastside BeltLine Trail, especially Old Fourth Ward (OFW), have seen a surge in upper-middle class populations, luxury infrastructure, and non-black culture. Some argue that these changes have displaced original, low-income residents and reduced the amount of affordable housing and black cultural centers.<sup>2</sup> This case study asserts that the BeltLine has thus far acted to replace rather than to preserve and revive spaces, culture, infrastructure, and histories that have been the cornerstone of Atlanta's black communities for generations. However, as BeltLine and BeltLine-adjacent development progresses, opportunities still exist to implement equitable development strategies on the city's Westside, particularly by responding to class differences within Atlanta's black communities.

The data collected in this project suggests that the Atlanta BeltLine project could incorporate revitalization strategies that are more sensitive to classism in the historically black neighborhoods of Ashview Heights and the Atlanta University Center (AUC). Although limited in scope, the eight semi-structured interviews, seven informal interviews, ethnographic observations, and spatial analysis conducted in this study indicate that existing residents' socio-economic status negatively affects their capacity to preserve and revive traditional black culture surrounding the BeltLine. Interviewees who identified as low-income or working-class renters expressed skepticism that they benefited from BeltLine development as much as black homeowners and businessmen do. The challenges facing longtime black renters as they seek to preserve or revive their culture and homes threaten the authentic black neighborhood character of Ashview Heights and the AUC, where most residents are renters. This case study explores the following question: What could revitalization look like that prioritizes the interests of longtime low-income black renters and builds from the bottom up?





## THE BELTLINE AND THE SOUTHWEST REGION

*Alicia:* The political scale of things has changed. The West End community president was recently a white woman, and I can't necessarily say that she speaks for our interest, so that's disheartening. Renovated homes now cost \$400,000. It's harder to find a place to stay that's affordable and a lot of voices are being mitigated by newcomers who have money. The Monday Night Brewery facility, the epicenter of the Westside BeltLine Trail, is one of the largest developments without a large percent of African American stakes in it.

Transit infrastructure has played a major role in structuring the racial and class inequality that persists in Atlanta's southwest black neighborhoods today. The first settlement of the area now known as Atlanta was founded at the end of Georgia's state-sponsored Western and Atlantic Railroad in 1835.<sup>3</sup> Despite the rail's destruction amid the Civil War, Atlanta rose as a transportation hub in the late 19th century, which brought growth across all strata of society, including the black middle class. Yet despite growth and prominence of the black community, segregation still excluded black Atlantans from affluent white neighborhoods. Until Jim Crow ended, Atlanta's initial transit infrastructure, including streetcars and passenger rail, catered to white neighborhoods in the city's southwest, whereas black areas were situated further away from transit lines.<sup>4</sup>


In the 20th century, two additional transit projects lay the foundation for Atlanta to emerge as the "Black Mecca," where opportunity and disenfranchisement exist simultaneously. In the 1960s, the construction of Interstate Highway

20, coupled with the outlawing of discriminatory housing covenants, spurred white flight to the suburbs.<sup>5</sup> Suburbanization segregated Atlanta severely, with some neighborhoods becoming more than 90 percent African American. In 1971, *Ebony* magazine deemed Atlanta "the Black Mecca of the South" because of the city's large black middle and upper class, high percentage of black homeowners, black political power, elite black universities, black dominance in entertainment, and strategic alliance with middle-class whites. However, the increasing black middle-class prominence coincided with severe public and private disinvestment in southwest Atlanta neighborhoods, as commercial infrastructure, businesses, franchises, and jobs migrated to the suburbs.

In 1980, the completion of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) provided suburbanites with another way to easily commute to the city and encouraged prosperous blacks to leave deteriorating neighborhoods. Atlanta lost 21 percent of its population between 1970 and 1990.<sup>6</sup> By the 1990s, Atlanta had the highest proportion of residents in public housing in the U.S. Despite the massive growth in black homeownership and an increase in black elected officials, the numbers of low-income renters and vacant homes increased, blight expanded, neighborhood dilapidation surged, and crime escalated.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, these conditions still characterize the Ashview Heights and AUC neighborhoods today.

Atlanta's past transit projects fostered racial and class inequality. What will be the legacy of the current Atlanta BeltLine? Will it be different? As early as 1999, the founder of the BeltLine, Ryan Gravel, articulated a mission to simultaneously resolve Atlanta's growing traffic issues and empower marginalized communities.<sup>8</sup> Gravel's goal was to connect 45 in-town neighborhoods via a 22-mile loop of multi-use trails, modern streetcars, and parks—all based on the equitable revival of Atlanta's historic railroad corridors. Changes in the Old Fourth Ward (OFW), on Atlanta's near east side, have raised questions about whether the BeltLine will revive historically black neighborhoods.





Home of the site where Dr. Martin Luther King was born, the location of the MLK National Historical Park, Ebenezer Baptist Church, and the Sweet Auburn District, the Old Fourth Ward now accommodates a growing non-black and affluent population. According to Brookings Institution demographer William Frey, the black population in the Fourth Ward decreased to less than 50 percent, while the white population doubled from 16 percent to 34 percent from 2000 to 2018.<sup>9</sup> Median home prices have risen from \$130,000 in 2012 to \$364,000 in 2017. The Atlanta BeltLine Partnership (ABP) has plans to build 5,600 affordable housing units by 2030, but so far fewer than 1,000 units have been completed.<sup>10</sup>

The growing affordable housing crisis in areas like the OFW has led many to question whether the BeltLine is a promising equitable development project. Gravel resigned from the ABP in 2016. Aware of growing skepticism, Mayor Keisha Bottoms has declared a \$1 billion revitalization initiative that will assist Atlanta natives with increased property taxes, renovation requirements, and affordable housing construction.<sup>11</sup>

BeltLine developers and Mayor Bottoms seem to present promising opportunities for the black community to preserve and revive their beloved neighborhoods. However, research for this case study suggests that longtime homeowners and renters are unequally positioned to take advantage of these revitalization initiatives. Class division left the BeltLine developmental process explored in this project biased in favor of black middle-class homeowners and against low-income renter interviewees.

In this project, low-income renter interviewees advocated for stricter accountability procedures for BeltLine developers who violate benchmark goals. To ensure affordable housing in BeltLine apartments, interviewees for this project asserted that the current median income requirement needed to be capped before it continues to skew and increase with more affluent newcomers.

## OVERCOMING CLASSISM IN BELTLINE DEVELOPMENT

*Alexandria:* Why aren't marginal communities taking over the political process and taking over their community organizations? Instead of being handed down legislation to neighborhood planning units (NPU) and community organization, we should be sending policy up. We should be using these times not to see the referendum that's been given to us by the BeltLine, but we should be taking this as an ongoing work session, which asks, what do you want and what's your idea? I think sometimes we get organizing backwards—top-down instead of bottom-up! Our responsibility is to flip that.

This case study raises the following question: Can the Atlanta BeltLine break ties with inequitable development patterns surrounding new transportation infrastructure? One major success of the BeltLine is the developers' willingness to collaborate with neighborhood organizers and incorporate neighborhood feedback into the BeltLine planning process. However, in my analysis of Ashview Heights and the AUC, developers failed to address how socio-economic status as a homeowner or renter in the Black Mecca influences who can preserve and revive the authenticity of black neighborhoods against strong private interests. Although the city is home to a large black population and collaboration with developers may be racially inclusive, it is not class inclusive.

Black homeowners have held considerable political power, but in a way that has not necessarily been beneficial to working-class black residents in the past. After transitioning into the Black Mecca, the black middle class has dominated



the local government since the mayoral election of the legendary Maynard Jackson in 1973. Since the 1970s, black mayors have collaborated with the white middle class to secure business opportunities for the black community.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Hope VI program funded the Atlanta Housing Authority's efforts to rid itself of all public housing projects, which led to the massive displacement of longtime low-income renters under black leadership.<sup>13</sup> Fundamentally, class division became a major aspect of the Black Mecca.

Although Atlanta natives along all class lines are mobilizing against displacement in southwest Atlanta neighborhoods, the development process appeared favorable to black homeowner interviewees who saw it as revitalization and limiting toward low-income renter interviewees who feared displacement. One of the interviewees, Alexandria, represents low-income renters. Her frustration with the political process shaping the BeltLine is rooted in the city and developers' failure to reconcile the impact of class divides in the southwest neighborhoods. Alexandria realizes that NPUs and neighborhood organizations are insufficient if they are dominated by middle-class homeowners. In Ashview Heights and the AUC, all neighborhood association executive members are middle- and upper-class homeowners. Many longtime residents felt these organizations were not welcoming to working-class renters, who compose 70 percent of residents. Further, these NPUs and neighborhood organizations do not directly contribute to anti-displacement policies in the local government or add anti-displacement to the agendas of BeltLine developers.


Based on the research of this case study, the current political process grants more power to influence the outcome of BeltLine development to black middle-class homeowners than working-class renters. However, it restricts homeowners' power by limiting input to approval or disapproval of what city council proposes instead of allowing residents to devise their own neighborhood development plans. Accordingly, interviewees recommended a revitalization center in the southwest region where

the collaborative process and anti-displacement initiatives could always reach longtime residents of both homeowners and renter socio-economic status. Until Atlanta accomplishes a more class-inclusive development process, the city may be less likely to break ties with inequitable development patterns.

Negotiations between middle-class residents and developers have resulted in 11 new urban gardens in the historically black West End neighborhood adjacent to the AUC, housing tours that invigorate neighborhood pride to redefine the West End's negative narrative, and neighborhood BeltLine activities, such as the Atlanta BeltLine Westside 5k/8k run, which encourage community gatherings. Outside these collective endeavors, individual organizers such as Jeremy or the West End native, Aaminah, have partnered with BeltLine developers to guide the expansion of transit and commercial infrastructure along the Westside Trail. BeltLine success stories were mainly achieved in the black middle-class West End neighborhood, where the BeltLine fulfilled many of residents' demands.

In contrast, the predominantly low-income renters of AUC and Ashview Heights have experienced a series of BeltLine defeats. Despite a petition of 5,000 signatures, the ABP proceeded to destroy the community garden in Ashview Heights, which now sits vacant and contaminated with pesticides. After residents raised objections to BeltLine art exhibit on the Westside Trail in Ashview Heights showcasing black men wearing orange jumpsuits in jail, the ABP declined a low-income renter's request for a local artist to display art.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the ABP tried to dismiss a black low-income renter's request to remove what he considered a racist monkey mascot on a newly built playground until a white man legitimized his viewpoint.

The Westside Trail has empowered black middle- and upper-class homeowners and subordinated low-income renters. Disparities in tangible results of activism among the middle-class homeowners and low-income renters exist. In order to enact truly equitable development and prevent displacement, it is clear that BeltLine developers



must improve awareness of the ways that socio-economic status determines the extent to which natives can directly inform the development of the BeltLine. The interviews conducted for this case study suggest the city could perhaps leverage rent-to-own housing to uplift low-income renters' socio-economic status and increase their capacity to preserve and revive the soul of Atlanta's disenfranchised black neighborhoods. Most importantly, BeltLine developers should refrain from devaluing the voices of low-income renters contributing to the conversation of BeltLine development and equitable revitalization. Altogether, the BeltLine project offers Atlanta natives the opportunity to resist replacement and influence revitalization, but true equity should start from the largest and most vulnerable population in historically underserved black neighborhoods—low-income renters.

## CONCLUSION

*Jeremy:* They're always talking about the people who are coming in and not the people that are here. Yesterday, Ryan Gravel was saying that the BeltLine rail needs to happen now because 2.5 million people are expected to move to Atlanta in the next 20 years. But I'm just like, there have been more projects relating to transportation that have already displaced people. That's why I wholeheartedly feel like the distribution of transit funds should be based on benchmarks for affordable housing. I want the BeltLine to be developed, but not at the expense of people losing their roots or the city losing its soul.

Will the Atlanta BeltLine break the cycle of racial and class inequality attributed to past shifts in transit infrastructure? The Beltline's encouragement of neighborhood collaboration is only the first step. Now, BeltLine developers should also consider the racial and class inequality that has shaped the current plight of these neighborhoods. Moving beyond mere recognition, BeltLine developers and local government should leverage the area's complex history to develop revitalization agendas that transcend Atlanta's past failures. As several interviewees highlighted, the BeltLine must alter the distribution of resources and start with low-income renters and black cultural entities, not with the socio-economic demands of newcomers or even black middle-class homeowners.

The Atlanta BeltLine and citywide anti-displacement initiatives may prevent or exacerbate displacement in developing southwest neighborhoods. The effects of these revitalization efforts are still unfolding. Nonetheless, equitable revitalization from the bottom up is possible and must include the development of rent-to-own housing, honoring the spatial and cultural demands from low-income renters. Equitable revitalization should augment and institutionalize penalties for BeltLine developers who violate affordable housing contracts. Equitable revitalization also requires that political power is shifted from NPUs and neighborhood organizations dominated by middle-class homeowners to a revitalization center where low-income renters can access economic and cultural opportunities on an ongoing basis. Ultimately, politicking with the Atlanta BeltLine from the bottom up exposes potholes that must be repaired on the road to revitalization.

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**AKILAH FAVORS** is an Atlanta native, who is pursuing her Ph.D. in Sociology at the U.C. Berkeley. She is passionate about studying sociological phenomena that pertain to racial empowerment, activism, and politics. At Spelman College, she completed her senior thesis on youth activists' endeavors to challenge systemic invisibility and structural racism in Argentina's Afro-descendant movement. Moreover, she studied Black/Coloured student protests for diversity at Afrikaans Universities in South Africa.

# Encouraging Investment and Preservation While Mitigating Vulnerability to Affordability and Risk of Displacement

## A Qualitative Assessment of the North Birmingham, Alabama Neighborhood

BY JERAN HERBERT

This paper seeks to assess residents' and economic development practitioners' familiarity with, perception of, and attitudes towards urban revitalization and gentrification in the predominantly black neighborhood of North Birmingham in Birmingham, Alabama. To explore these themes, I use interviews conducted with residents of the North Birmingham neighborhood as well as representatives of the local business community. While the initial goal of this study was to explore the relationships between affordability, risk of displacement, and building characteristics, my findings suggest that present challenges faced by North Birmingham's residents are due less to rising housing costs than historical and present

disinvestment. Findings also suggest, however, that the neighborhood's access to major transportation networks, proximity to a thriving downtown, high rate of blight and vacancy, and rich history could lead to neighborhood revitalization in the near future. This possibility makes many interviewed citizens and stakeholders excited for a potential revival, but not without concerns about gentrification and displacement. Fittingly, North Birmingham could prove to be a key for how the city intends to balance economic development, preservation, and housing affordability in the context of historical neglect, injustice, and future growth.



## GENTRIFICATION AND THE LOCAL CONTEXT

In this paper, I discuss revitalization and gentrification in North Birmingham, which I define as a form of neighborhood change that occurs when higher-income groups move into low-income areas, potentially altering the cultural and financial landscape of the original neighborhood.<sup>1</sup> In many ways similar to midcentury urban renewal programs, modern redevelopment and investment in downtown areas can neglect the inclusion of longtime residents. Increased demand and housing costs exacerbates housing-cost burdens, raises the potential for displacement of long-term low-income residents, and heightens barriers to entry for new low-income residents looking to move to places of opportunity.

Looking at Birmingham, Alabama, we see many urban development processes like those experienced by other cities. However, situated in the deep south, the city's story is also intertwined with historical segregation and discrimination laws, such as Jim Crow. The legacies of these policies are still visible in the built environment, in current states of disenfranchisement, and in high rates of poverty among the city's African American residents.

The neighborhood of North Birmingham—one of the six neighborhoods that make up the larger community of North Birmingham—is located north of the city's downtown Central Business District. Due to its proximity to factory jobs, the neighborhood was originally developed as a series of company-built camps for industrial workers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1886, the North Birmingham Land Company planned and developed a 900-acre industrial and residential town, which established the core of the present-day neighborhood.<sup>2</sup>

According to one respondent, due to the neighborhood's proximity to industrial areas, the neighborhood is a perfect example of environmental injustice. The decline of the industry about 40-50 years ago has led to an overall deterioration of the neighborhood.

## BLIGHT AND THE PROSPECT OF GENTRIFICATION

Having experienced decades of disinvestment and decline, the North Birmingham community now contains a prevalence of blighted properties, vacant buildings, and underdeveloped land. According to the North Birmingham Community Framework Plan, 10.1% of the North Birmingham neighborhood's properties are undeveloped. A fourth of properties in the area are considered deteriorated parcels, which implies they are structurally sound but in need of minor repairs, renovation, and/or maintenance. Another 6.5% are categorized as dilapidated, which indicates the need for major repairs, renovation, and/or maintenance.

Vacant, deteriorated, and dilapidated properties present serious issues for residents, community stakeholders, business owners, investors, and the city. While posing health and safety hazards for citizens, they also attract criminal activity and are unsafe for children, residents, and citizens in immediate surroundings. Furthermore, blighted properties impose a burden on city services needed for additional maintenance, policing, and fire extinguishment. Consequently, the diminishment in property values for these properties and their surroundings also deprive essential city tax revenues. Overall, such properties convey a sense of disinvestment and show a lack of demand in the market for new development in North Birmingham. This, combined with the uptick in crime have resulted in some of the lowest housing prices in the city.

Blight, vacancy, and a stalled property market in North Birmingham contrast with the increasing prosperity and popularity of City Center, only a few miles away. According to *Business Alabama*, as of 2015, investments in the downtown core of Birmingham included 32 projects under construction, totaling at \$728 million—\$200 million of which is going towards reuse of historic buildings. Concurrently, the population has increased up to 40 percent since 2000.<sup>3</sup>





Unfortunately, this growth has not extended to surrounding areas like North Birmingham. Yet, as many interviewees remarked, present prosperity could lead to an increase in real estate activity. This has led to both the hope of revival and concerns over gentrification and displacement in the community.

## RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Overall residential respondents of the North Birmingham neighborhood had similar views on the changes and/or lack thereof in their community. A common observation made by these residents was the demographic shift that has occurred over the last two decades. Generally, the racial composition of the neighborhood has remained the same: predominantly black. However, the neighborhood has seen an exodus of the black middle class as well as family households. "At one point my family decided that we will move outside of the city for a better opportunity; that was over ten years ago," says one respondent. The implication is that the lack of opportunities for economic or personal growth caused families that could afford to move to do just that. This "black flight," in turn has left behind a concentration of poverty in the area, further exacerbating the issues that the community has faced and lowering the economic base which could support local entrepreneurs.

Residents also pointed out the increase in demolition over the last few years, which unfortunately, has not been accompanied by an uptick in new construction. However, there is hope for improved development in the area. According to one respondent, a former intern with the Birmingham Land Bank, "Under this new [City of Birmingham] administration, their central platform is Neighborhood Revitalization. So, they are focusing their efforts on building stronger communities by transforming old neighborhoods."

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVE

A recurring point was made by all of respondents: lack of investment. Gentrification is not really an issue faced in this area because there is too little economic activity. Though the area has a diverse housing stock—ranging from affordable housing units to upper middle-class homes — degradation from years of disinvestment has made many structures uninhabitable. As with residents, stakeholder respondents highlighted the demographic change in the area not necessarily due to housing affordability but more so general economic need. Though the area remains predominantly black, "the [demographic] transition from a community of family to non-family households" has resulted in a change of the overall makeup of the community. From a community of homeowners to a rental community, over time the neighborhood will receive less and less investment. These social changes have impacts economically as market and income level is no longer sufficient enough to attract and sustain new business.

## CONCLUSION

The North Birmingham neighborhood and surrounding community have been plagued by economic decline and lack of investment for the last 40 to 50 years. Though it is yet to experience gentrification, the current policies and housing prices, and physical state of many structures, the neighborhood may indeed be vulnerable to issues of affordability and displacement in the future.

A range of solutions were offered by the economic development practitioners interviewed for this study. First and foremost was to prioritize preservation of properties and citizens. North Birmingham has a "rich cultural history" and is considered the "birthplace of the civil rights movement" according to one respondent. The preservation of historical elements throughout the neighborhood can be vital to its identity. One respondent suggested the exploration of tax



credits to support commercial investments, as well local and/or state resources to support residential investments. The investment into infrastructure and school systems was also highlighted. Through my interviews I also found that there is a need for the increase of healthcare options in the area. According to one respondent, “zip codes less than 2 miles away have higher life expectancies.” The most prominent of the suggestions was the introduction of equity policies for growth. North Birmingham is a neighborhood full of potential and as the growth and development of downtown Birmingham spread, it’s only a matter of time before the neighborhood starts to attract similar levels of investment. According to one respondent, “putting equitable policies in place before the market turns around” can help prevent displacement and housing affordability issues that may be on the horizon.

## INTERVIEWEES

### North Birmingham Residents

- ▶ Ilesha Watts-Moffet
- ▶ Marley Hicks
- ▶ Melissa Robinson
- ▶ Daniel

### Economic Development Practitioners

- ▶ Charles Ball, Executive Director, Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
- ▶ Ivan Holloway, Executive Director, Urban Impact Inc.
- ▶ Christopher Hatcher, Director, City of Birmingham - Planning, Engineering & Permits

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**JERAN HERBERT** recently earned his Master’s degree in Urban and Regional Planning program at Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, specializing in International Development. His research is focused on urbanization in Latin America and the Caribbean and its impacts on food security. Growing up in the South, he has also seen firsthand the effects of housing affordability and displacement in this region, particularly on POC.

# We Ain't Goin' Nowhere

## Community Identity, Preservation, and Displacement in Chicago

BY NI'SHELE JACKSON

Bronzeville and Woodlawn are two black neighborhoods in Chicago with significant African American histories. Woodlawn, however, is often overshadowed by Bronzeville, which is more widely recognized as having a historical legacy worthy of public recognition. Both neighborhoods face strong development pressures and struggle with high property vacancy, and in response, residents are organizing to resist gentrification and displacement.

This case study explores the role of community identity in organized resistance to displacement in Bronzeville and Woodlawn. A shared sense of neighborhood identity—especially when reinforced through commemoration and preservation—can build a community's *collective efficacy*, which is defined as the ability of tight-knit communities to achieve common purposes and goals

together.<sup>1</sup> To explore this, I compared the physical characteristics and prominent development pressures of both communities and interviewed neighborhood residents. At the start, I expected that Bronzeville residents would possess a united front against displacement because of their strong neighborhood identity and rich cultural history. However, Woodlawn shows us how the preservation of everyday places, such as affordable housing complexes and more recent histories, is equally important to neighborhood identity. Often developers rely on the forced displacement of residents, especially those in affordable housing complexes, to acquire properties. Bronzeville, Woodlawn, and their neighborhood identities suffer from the displacement of residents because of flaws and a lack of action in a city initiative, called the Plan for Transformation, to replace public housing stock.



## NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Bronzeville and Woodlawn are long-standing African American communities on the South Side of Chicago. While both neighborhoods are equally rich in history, Bronzeville is more widely regarded as culturally and historically distinct. Split between the Grand Boulevard and Douglas areas, Bronzeville has been a hub for black Chicagoans since the Great Migration of black southerners to northern, segregated cities, which was facilitated by the neighborhood's accessibility by train beginning in the 1920s.

Nine structures in Bronzeville are city landmarks, and numerous markers around Bronzeville identify historically significant places, including the former home of abolitionist and journalist, Ida B. Wells. The South Side Community Art Center, a former mansion that was bought and redeveloped by local black artists with support from the Works Progress Administration in 1940, is another prominent cultural and Chicago Historic Landmark.

Woodlawn, on the other hand, has a shorter history as an African American community. In the 1950s, blacks moved into the neighborhood following white flight to the suburbs. The University of Chicago has also greatly influenced building patterns in the neighborhood. Yet throughout its relatively brief history, Woodlawn has been a hub for talented jazz musicians such as Ray Charles; a stage for infamous community organizing efforts by the gang, Blackstone Rangers; and home to legendary DJs such as Chicago household name, DJ Herb Kent.<sup>2</sup>

## VACANT LOTS

Like many South Side black neighborhoods, Bronzeville and Woodlawn share a common characteristic: vacant lots. In Bronzeville, vacant lots in residential areas are juxtaposed against beautiful mansions now divided into apartments and other small living spaces. Public art abounds in Bronzeville; mosaics and large painted murals of black faces or Egyptian imagery decorate

many buildings. In Woodlawn there is less grand architecture and fewer murals, but similarly, the empty lots stand out against the neighborhood's three-story greystones and brick, two- and three-flat apartments. Vacant, underutilized, or deteriorated storefronts are found in both neighborhoods. Many older residents remember when the properties were well-used. Bronzeville resident Adilisha Safi ponders aloud:

Vacant lots. Vacant lots. Why? What's up with this? For me that's most disturbing. You see homeless people and you got vacant lots...You know there was something there. What was that? I'm always asking, what was there? And if there were people, where are they now? It was either schools, or homes, or a business so, where are they?

The vacancies cause economic drain from the neighborhoods because there are few local businesses where residents can spend their money.<sup>3</sup> Residents must go to other neighborhoods for simple things such as groceries, which disconnects residents from their communities and works against the formation of local identity. Safi also comments on how monetary drain affects her community identity stating:

We're strangers, we live next door to each other, but we don't ask any questions [even though we are] almost able to see the same people constantly...money is primarily the issue. The community is losing money because it cannot contribute to the wellbeing. Without everything being filled and money being poured in, it becomes a problem.



Vacant lots in Bronzeville also give the neighborhood a flat skyline devoid of variation in building heights. Affordable housing towers, like the one named for Ida B. Wells, have been demolished and replaced with chain establishments such as Culver's or more expensive grocery stores like Mariano's. For residents like Adilisha Safi this flatness represents displacement. This feeling of flatness mirrors the city's Plan for Transformation, which calls for the transition from public housing high-rises to mixed-income low rises. Under this plan, a select few residents were moved to new housing, but only a portion of residents were able to be housed. Similarly, Woodlawn has many empty lots, but what differs is that many are being bought up by developers in the eastern portion of the neighborhood. This development of east Woodlawn is being driven by its proximity to the Obama Presidential Center and to Jackson Park.

## DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES

Powerful developers are active in both Woodlawn and Bronzeville. In Woodlawn, The University of Chicago is the most active developer. Centered in the adjacent neighborhood of Hyde Park, the university is a dominant institution across all of Chicago's South Side. In Bronzeville, a significant source of change is the McCormick Place convention center and its campus of buildings that border Bronzeville. The development corporation, Draper and Kramer, Inc., in Bronzeville is similar to The University of Chicago in terms of power and influence. But McCormick Place is particularly valuable for studying neighborhood change because ongoing development is carried out by the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (MPEA), a municipal development corporation. As a corporation owned by the government, MPEA operates more transparently than The University of Chicago and is subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

The University of Chicago and the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority differ significantly in the populations that they serve. The university's main constituents are its students, staff, and faculty. Therefore, many of its developments serve a large population that may not be from or plan to reside in Chicago. Many recent developments have been student housing and other spaces that inherently exclude community members not affiliated with the university. As The University of Chicago buys and develops more land in Woodlawn for its academic population, it takes away affordable living opportunities from longtime residents. The university has also sold or demolished much of the older affordable housing in order to provide new housing for its students, faculty, and staff through its Residential Properties program. These properties are featured buildings that the university owns and rents to students, staff, and faculty at lower rates than other private landlords in the area. However, as reported by The Chicago Maroon, The University of Chicago's student newspaper, much of that property has been sold to private companies for profit.<sup>4</sup> As a result, much of the affordable properties in Woodlawn—whether for university-affiliated people or otherwise—have been privatized or demolished.

The University of Chicago has built institutions for Woodlawn residents, such as The University of Chicago Charter School and the Logan Center for the Arts. However, these investments need to be a more consistent and prominent pillar of the university's developmental goals. The university has many more improvements to make regarding listening to residents about its role in developing Woodlawn. For example, activists of organizations such as STOP had to lobby for years to get the university to react to their pleas for an adult trauma center.<sup>5</sup>



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordable housing is important in Bronzeville and Woodlawn because black communities have been systematically excluded from the public resources and private lending that made owning a home more accessible. Currently, the nationwide black homeownership rate is declining.<sup>6</sup> Professor Eve Ewing at The University of Chicago raises the questions about preservation, affordability, and ownership in the city:

In both [Bronzeville and Woodlawn] the obvious thing is that black people are still primarily renting. What does preservation look like or mean in that context? Some of the buildings to me that are historically important are still privately owned. But they're not necessarily owned by people who have the resources, or the attention, or the energy to make them historic sites. A lot of our important places, we don't own, and so it's really hard to mark them as such.

Preserving and creating affordable housing is essential to maintaining Chicago's communities. Affordable homes help residents keep their livelihoods in the neighborhoods and local culture that they created. Neighborhood activists and organizers are currently fighting for the passage of [or enforcement of] the Keeping the Promise ordinance, which calls for more accountability and transparency in Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) development of affordable housing. Woodlawn resident Michelle Williams noted that she was aghast at a Chicago Tenants Council meeting when she learned that the presence of bedbugs and mold does not affect the federal evaluation scoring for public housing conditions and management. While HUD does address mold and bedbugs in its written policy, the language in the policy is weak, which indicates that perhaps the policies aren't energetically enforced. The continuous deterioration of buildings stirs anxieties on the

part of residents about the future. Throughout the South Side, residents must fight tooth and nail for building maintenance.

Woodlawn residents want to protect a neighborhood identity distinct from The University of Chicago, and residents come together often and in large numbers to find ways to preserve affordable housing. In 2006, residents of Grove Parc Plaza—an affordable housing project slated for closure—mobilized to stop the building's demolition. In the end, they received a federal grant for their complex to be revitalized. Likewise, around 400 people from Woodlawn and surrounding areas attended a recent town hall meeting about the Community Benefits Agreement for the Obama Presidential Center.

Although a difficult task, residents continue to remain connected and informed. As Woodlawn residents Laura and Mike Medina speak for themselves and their neighbors: "We have meeting fatigue...it's exhausting. There's a meeting with this guy who's doing this and there's a meeting with this person..." However, most residents are determined to not be pushed out. Michelle Williams also said to me jokingly: "A blind man can see what they done did. They have four miles left on the lakefront. And we're in the midst of those four miles. I'ma live with President Obama and Michelle if they tear down my building."

## PRESERVATION, ACTIVISM, AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Throughout the course of my study, I interviewed business owners, renters, senior home residents, homeowners, community organizers, and historians in Bronzeville and Woodlawn to determine what types of connections residents feel to their communities and whether these connections influence their anti-displacement activism and community organizing. As an interviewer, I paid attention to the types of organizing residents partake in, how the physical makeup of their neighborhood makes them feel, and whether they are aware of the city policies that affect them.



In Bronzeville, I noticed that community members felt a bond to the physical spaces of the neighborhood and its history. Through historic preservation, residents felt that they were not only protecting their space, but also their legacy. While visiting the South Side Community Art Center (SSCAC) I asked about the importance of historic preservation in neighborhood change. A Community member volunteer, Adilisha Safi quickly replied: “We ain’t going nowhere.” Jeannette Blackwell agreed: “We need institutions that can tell our history and preserve our history and our contributions... [historic preservation] has a profound makeup on Bronzeville...this institution [SSCAC] will make sure [Bronzeville] remains a hub of African American culture.”

Woodlawn residents are also connected to the physical space of their neighborhoods. While talking about Woodlawn’s park space, 30-year resident Rose Rogers-Harris states that she has seen “thousands” of changes in Woodlawn. She recalls that during her teenage years “there were stores all along 63rd street...it was a thriving community.” In acknowledgement of the university’s interests and its rocky relationship with the community, she goes on to say that Woodlawn is the “step cousin of Hyde Park.” Business owner Marcus Gill also remembers a childhood with a more prominent business district. It is a history he is trying to preserve and that pushed him to start his own business. Preserving the vast public park space is also important because it is a physically beautiful area that promotes community gathering and mental and physical health. In Woodlawn, it is not always the extraordinary things that residents want to preserve—it is the ordinary structures of their community.

It seems that activists in Woodlawn have also been able to link the preservation of remaining affordable housing complexes built in the 1940s through the 1960s to their present fight to remain in the neighborhood without being displaced. Residents of Woodlawn may not possess a very clear and unified public narrative like Bronzeville, but they nonetheless have a strong sense of community identity rooted, in part, in a strong

history of collaboration and organizing for housing borne out of the relationship to The University of Chicago. A legacy of affordable housing policy, even with its shortcomings in management, guide their desires to keep public housing as an important part of community development.

In Bronzeville, the connection between preservation and anti-displacement efforts seems less solidified. The perceived unity of Bronzeville residents is very much tied to the community’s attachment to its history of Black Belt Chicago. However, Bronzeville has lost significant “people power.” The neighborhood has been constantly disrupted through the removal of longtime residents who once lived in now-demolished public housing, thus preventing steady resident collaboration over time. For non-residents, this goes unnoticed because its physical historical identity remains largely intact. In this sense, Bronzeville’s historical identity masks a complicated changing identity.

## CONCLUSION

Preservation in Woodlawn and Bronzeville is often difficult to achieve because of a systemic lack of resources, a continued loss of affordable housing, and a perceived lack of value by influential city stakeholders. Historic preservation in these and other African American communities should not solely be about grand achievement but must also be about maintaining ordinary community assets that fortify community identity. Affordable housing preservation and historic preservation need to go hand in hand. Otherwise, the very residents who ascribe meaning and depth to what is being preserved will no longer be able to afford to live in the neighborhood and will move away. City policies have resulted in the demolition of affordable housing and the promised rebuilding of new housing has been slow. As a consequence, whole communities have been displaced and their former homes flattened. Woodlawn resident Mike Medina summarized this by stating: “[I]f the people aren’t here anymore the stories go away...old buildings and historic stuff just become monetized and commodified...this is a fancy historic building with



no story behind it.” To sustain strong community identity and its benefits, we must fight to preserve and maintain affordable housing spaces for black residents in Woodlawn and Bronzeville, Chicago and in communities across the country.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Jeannette Blackwell, Prentice Butler, Jenna Leigh Dublin, Prof. Eve Ewing, Marcus Gill, Rose Harris-Rogers, Carson Hartmann, Eric and LaJuana Jackson, Ald. Sophia King, Laura and Mike Medina, Ward Miller, Lauren Moltz, Natalie Moore, Adilisha Safi, Michelle Williams, the National Trust for Historic Preservation Chicago Field Office, Southside Community Art Center, Southside Together Organizing for Power, and the rest of the fellows for aiding me in my research and helping me create a short, but dense narrative. I appreciate and thank you all deeply for your time.

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**NI'SHELE JACKSON** is a graduate of Wellesley College with a double major in American Studies and Spanish. They desire to tell the stories of resistance, art, and community in Black neighborhoods on the Southside of Chicago. They will show that Chicagoans are not simply recipients of the corruption and negligence fueled violence in their communities but are active citizens with rich histories of activism stemming from immense care for their city and their people. They aim to show how beautiful communities have formed from Chicago's ugly, continuing legacy of segregation and the complexities in preserving these segregated and now changing neighborhoods.



# Cultural Heritage and Displacement in Historically African American Neighborhoods in Los Angeles

BY KAELYN RODRIGUEZ

“We must remember that the conditions and the very existence of social movements enable participants to imagine something different, to realize that things need not always be this way.”

—*Robin D. G. Kelley*

## INTRODUCTION

This case study narrative examines my interviews with three Black Los Angeles area residents about their experiences of Blackness, home ownership, and home rental in the Baldwin Hills, Compton, and Leimert Park neighborhoods. My interviewees are Auntie Marjorie, Julius Franklin, and Mary Senyonga each of whom I know personally, which helped the conversations to be open-ended. Each person shared their ideas, thoughts, and memories with me on their own terms. In analyzing these interviews, two thematic threads surfaced. One thread is the enduring effect of systemic injustice and segregated housing in southern California. Two of the three interviewees discussed how past discriminatory practices of redlining affect their current housing situations. Redlining emerged in the 1930s and describes when banks and other lenders refused to invest in poor, primarily African American neighborhoods on a discriminatory basis. In counterpoint, another thread that surfaced is the Black excellence, achievement, creativity, and joyful community building within these neighborhoods that were once redlined.



This case study narrative is not only about the past, it also connects the significance of redlining to contemporary gentrification and displacement as another type of housing discrimination. In each interviewee's story, their life experiences of family, belonging, and community building endured because of the determination of themselves and their neighbors in the face of systemic inequality. The in-depth interviews with Auntie Marjorie, Julius Franklin and Mary Senyonga were analyzed alongside census data and existing literature, and demonstrate the significance of owning and renting homes for Black residents in Los Angeles as a means for setting roots, lifting up community, and affirming Black lives.

## AUNTIE MARJORIE | BALDWIN HILLS

My Aunt Marjorie and Uncle Clarence moved from Texas to California in 1964 when Marjorie was 22 years old. They settled in Baldwin Hills in 1970, six years after the Rumford Act<sup>1</sup> was passed by the California State Legislature, which aimed to end housing discrimination in the state. Despite federal and local legislation banning the practices of redlining and restrictive covenants, discriminatory housing practices still persisted throughout Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1960s, Uncle Clarence earned his real estate license, which allowed him to acquire the lists of available homes that were not shown to Black buyers. Only through my uncle's profession were Marjorie and Clarence able to purchase the home in Baldwin Hills that they still live in today.

Through the neighborhood's history, pop culture, and people's understanding of the city, the name Baldwin Hills has come to represent Black Los Angeles. Housing in L.A. is also known for being expensive, and in the past ten years the construction of new, higher-end housing and amenities has made homeownership especially difficult for Black Angelenos. As recently as late June 2018, a new development plan in Baldwin Hills was approved by Los Angeles City Council that would create multiple condominium and apartment

buildings, as well as a hotel, shopping, and entertainment. Only ten percent of new housing is currently reserved for low-income renters.<sup>3</sup> While anti-discriminatory housing legislation was in place over 50 years ago, inequality and inequity in housing still disproportionately affect people of color.<sup>4</sup>

When reflecting on these new changes, Auntie Marjorie said, "It's changing all around ...changing but staying the same." In my interview with Aunt Marjorie, she told me that many young white professionals now call the community of Baldwin Hills *Silicon Beach*. While this small change of name alone won't physically displace any residents, the renaming of communities, especially when coupled with demographic shifts, signals potential displacement and growing social and racial inequality.<sup>5</sup> As cultural geographer and gender studies scholar Katherine McKittrick has written "To put it another way, naming place is also an act of naming the self and self-histories."<sup>6</sup> While the changes in the neighborhood take shape through new laws, development imperatives and economic conditions, the outcomes are familiar—Black displacement, whiteness as social and economic capital, racial, social and economic inequality.<sup>7</sup>

Over the past 48 years, Aunt Marjorie's beautiful home has been a safe place for family, friends, and members of her church community. Additionally, Aunt Marjorie and Uncle Clarence have created opportunities to build equity and intergenerational wealth for their adult children and grandchildren. In this way, their house in Baldwin Hills is more than a building: it represents intergenerational opportunity, prosperity and growth. Several times in the interview Aunt Marjorie expressed her hope for Baldwin Hills to remain affordable for young Black families. Although the community is changing in many ways, Auntie Marjorie and Uncle Clarence's ownership of the home is an important piece of her vision for sustaining Black community and her neighborhood's thriving. Their story includes struggles, but also the triumphs of Black residents in LA, and, in many ways due to the space that they have provided, their children and grandchildren will carry that story for years to come.



## JULIUS FRANKLIN | COMPTON

Julius Franklin is some 35 years younger than Aunt Marjorie, and his father, Julius Sr., bought their home in Compton when redlining was still commonly enforced. Originally from Alabama, Julius Sr. left the South fleeing racial violence and found himself in South Central Los Angeles right before the Watts Rebellion. Because of redlining, most Black residents in Compton settled west of the train tracks along the Alameda Corridor. The Franklin family, however, bought their home on the east side of the rail line after white residents of the neighborhood moved away during or after the Watts uprising.

At the time of their move, distinctions in the neighborhoods east and west of the train tracks were pronounced. As Julius Jr. said, “The streets [were] bigger, the houses [looked] better...” With its wide streets and majority single family homes, this new neighborhood contrasted with the neighborhoods to which redlining and other discriminatory policies often restricted Black Angelenos. While this type of environment could have left the Franklin family feeling alienated or unwelcome, Julius Sr. and other Black neighbors were undeterred. They took great pride in their homes and became deeply invested in the stewardship of their property and surrounding neighborhood. They maintained lawns and gardens, cleaned the street of litter, and ensured trash was managed regularly. Julius Jr. mentioned several times, “My father is from the South, he taught me to always do for myself. Don’t ever rely on someone else to take care of things for you.” Even now, Julius Sr. still trims the trees on this property himself and keeps the yard in good condition. He instilled these principles of pride into his children by teaching them to care for and run their home, by building relationships within the neighborhood and by having a regular practice of enjoying their community.<sup>8</sup>

In her book, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity*, Gaye Theresa Johnson uses what she calls, “alternative academies”<sup>9</sup> to examine how people of color in L.A., especially Afro-Latinx, Latinx, and Black communities have used spatial strategies to self-determine, build community, and in turn, resist “demarcations of race and class that emerged in the post-war era.” Building on these notions, I assert the Franklin family’s tradition of upkeeping property is a radical act of self-determination. In trimming trees, maintaining his lawn, and cleaning the street outside his home, Julius and those before him have worked to contradict common and negative perceptions of the Black spaces (i.e. “the ghetto”) and build community.

Even today, Julius Jr. has great visions for Compton’s future. For example, he plans to reinitiate a block club on his street, a community organization where neighbors gather to connect and collaborate on local issues. When he was growing up, block clubs were common. He hopes to revive that tradition for his young children to witness and for his community to benefit from. Julius also plans to run for office in the coming years, in order to build on areas of Compton where he sees opportunity. Throughout the interview, it was clear that his understanding of the neighborhood is rooted in his own homeownership, which in turn deeply informs his understanding of civic discourse, service, and leadership. In this respect, Black homeownership opposes white spatial hegemony and acts as an impetus for community building and dreaming for better futures. Julius Jr.’s visions for his community live beyond the scope of any shortcomings because he sees Compton’s past and future as a part of its glory. In his book *Freedom Dream*, Robin Kelley reminds us of prolific African Americans who dare to imagine life beyond immediate struggles, and I believe Julius Jr. falls in that category of person.<sup>10</sup>



## MARY SENYONGA | LEIMERT PARK

Unlike Aunt Marjorie and Julius Franklin, Mary Senyonga is not a homeowner. She rents her one-bedroom apartment in Leimert Park. Although renting signals less stability for some, for Mary, renting is a source of power. As a queer Black woman, housing can be especially difficult to secure, but she found her home through a network of queer Black women. A friend and colleague of Mary's lived in the unit before and passed the lease over to her. Both out of necessity for housing and as a point of care for another person who faces layers of marginalization, this network is incredibly practical and empowering for these women.

During the interview, Mary expressed, "Someone called my apartment a queer Black femme haven" citing the value of a home instilled by generations of queer Black femmes. This network has also been a source of her radicalization. When thousands in Los Angeles were outraged at the untimely deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile during the summer of 2016, hundreds of Black residents took to the streets in Leimert Park to protest, comfort each other and mourn together. The neighborhood gathering for these young men is a principle example of lifting up community and affirming Black life.

As a graduate student at UCLA, a historically white serving institution,<sup>11</sup> Mary is affirmed by her community of local Black artists, vendors, and activism that recognize and appreciate her experiences in the world. And when she graduates and settles into the next chapter of her life, moving will be much simpler because renting implicates less financial capital and fewer stakes. Additionally, she will pass the lease over to another queer Black woman who needs a safe space to call home. In this way, she and others participate in a tradition that carves out space for queer women in a housing market that is expensive, competitive, and biased towards heterosexuals. Amidst rising housing prices and fears of gentrification, practices like these that focus on helping Black residents

stay in their homes and communities are even more important. According to Social Explorer, Leimert Park's demographics have shifted dramatically since the 2010 census. In 2010, the Leimert Park was up to 90% Black, but the most recent data from 2016 demonstrates that it is no more than 80% Black. With a ten percent shift in less than ten years, the rates of displacement are alarming. While renting is a source of power for Mary, the reality remains that her rent has increased several times in the recent years, as she puts it, each time a Black resident moves out and white neighbors move in.

## CONCLUSION

Although redlining and restrictive covenants are no longer practiced, gentrification has become of primary concern for Black residents, who fear displacement from their homes and long-familiar neighborhoods. Based on the data in these interviews, I believe that these fears are being addressed with great innovation by African American renters and homeowners. Building from previous generations of oppression, older Black Angelenos understand the significance of passing their legacy on to their families, and young Black Angelenos are resisting gentrification by making space for each other and maintaining networks and ties in their community with the hopes of thriving Black families and neighborhoods.

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8. Kimberly Kinder discusses how self-provisioning activities in her book *DIY Detroit: Making Do in a City Without Services* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
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# Socio-Cultural Displacement and Preservation Strategies in Louisville, KY

BY SHAONTA' E. ALLEN

Louisville, Kentucky, is the 29th largest city in the United States and as such offers critical insights regarding contemporary urban change. This case study specifically focuses on Louisville's West End community to examine how factors such as affordability, displacement, and the physical built environment affect the lives of residents. The West End is a predominantly Black<sup>1</sup> area composed of nine distinct neighborhoods. West End residents occupy a social and physical space that is structurally and economically distinct from other areas of the city. Median annual income in the West End is \$21,071, and an average of 43 percent of this population lives below the poverty line. To put these figures into context, the West End's median annual income is less than half the amount of its neighboring communities in Jefferson County. Further illustrating the disparity, West End Louisville's poverty rate is nearly three times as high as the national rate of 15 percent. It is unsurprising then, that this neighborhood faces challenges because of these hyper-segregated and economically desolate realities. These challenges though, also lead to opportunities for change.

This study investigates the following research question: *How do Black residents in Louisville's West End community perceive urban change?* To understand residents' perceptions, data was pulled from the @WestOfNinthLouisville account, an Instagram profile run by "a husband/wife team armed with a camera & ability to never meet a stranger in these west #Louisville streets." This account highlights people as well as physical components of the nine Black neighborhoods that make up the West End. The couple created the account in August 2017 noting that the "purpose of this effort is to restore pride and bring back value into West Louisville." Overall, 233 digitized interview excerpts from the Instagram account were coupled with three in-depth interviews, which I conducted with local West End residents, to form the dataset for this study (n= 236).

I contend that the West End residents represented here possess what sociologists Francesca Poletta and James Jasper refer to as a collective identity, a "cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community."<sup>2</sup> Out of this collective



identity comes a shared understanding of the West End, including in this case, how the community is changing. This distinct understanding of the West End is a type of subjugated and situated knowledge or an “adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world” for residents.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the quotations used below are representative of the holistic West End experience.

Ultimately, findings indicate that West End residents are less concerned with accessing and retaining affordable housing and are most concerned with social-cultural displacement, which I define as the removing of social and cultural value from a physical space or location. This form of displacement affects civic, economic, and recreational opportunities. More specifically, the data illustrates that West End residents perceived social and cultural devaluation in four distinct ways: through (1) the white gaze, (2) institutional neglect, (3) vacant properties, and (4) nonexistent recreation.

## West Louisville's Nine Neighborhoods



- Algonquin
- California
- Chickasaw
- Park Duvalle
- Park Hill
- Parkland
- Portland
- Russell
- Shawnee

## THE WHITE GAZE

The data provides evidence that respondents perceived the West End community to be subjected to a “white gaze” due to the city’s hyper-segregation. The white gaze refers to the surveillance of Black people from the lens of white normalcy resulting in Black culture being viewed in a deficit manner. George Yancy, author of *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America*, notes that “white gazing is a deeply historical accretion, the result of white historical forces, values, assumptions, circuits of desire, institutional structures, irrational fears, paranoia and an assemblage of ‘knowledge’ that fundamentally configures what appears and how of that which appears”.<sup>4</sup> West End residents are very much aware of how outsiders perceive their community. For example, Brittany described the unfair scrutiny of the West End in stating: “When you see the West End and you hear about it, it’s all bad, it’s all negative...We’re not the only ones that have to deal with crime and things like that” (California, 9/5/2017).<sup>5</sup> Will additionally referenced the white gaze when mentioning: “You have people that don’t live in the West, looking in and thinking that everything’s bad. They have no idea what’s going on” (Chickasaw, 5/30/2018). Squeak agreed with these sentiments when saying, “Being in the West is cool. It’s not what everybody makes it seem...People are on the outside looking in. All they do is advertise the bad” (Russell, 7/2/2018).

Navigating the white gaze is cultural displacement because West End residents must defend and subvert negative discourses surrounding their neighborhood to maintain a sense of pride regarding where they come from. For instance, Sivonne described how she responds to community stereotypes when stating: “I just stand up for the West End. I feel like we get talked about the most down here, but we have the least. I don’t see what they expect, when the resources aren’t here” (Parkland, 12/11/2017).

Figure 1. WFPL News Louisville.” Map of Neighborhoods in the West End of Louisville, KY.” October 2016. <http://wfpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/westlouismap.png>.





Residents also perceived that police officers were among those who viewed their community through a white gaze. Will stated: “We have to deal with the police coming to harass us rather than protect us. They won’t protect us, so we’re just out here trying to survive [on our own]” (Chickasaw, 5/30/2018). In-depth interview data supported this claim. Two out of the three interview respondents cited police brutality as an issue in their neighborhood. They further acknowledged that black neighborhoods outside of the West End tend to experience less brutality and racial profiling. Interview respondent #3 shared that the Shively neighborhood, despite still being a part of the Louisville city limits, has its own separate police department, which eliminates the issue of police brutality since the officers get to be more involved with the residents. Interview respondent #2 additionally noted that the police respond differently in the South End community than they do in Shawnee, a West End neighborhood, because the South End has many prominent attributes such as Churchill Downs where the Kentucky Derby is held. Because Churchill Downs is a popular attraction, the city is very invested in sustaining its positive reputation and maintaining its upkeep, a reality that does not extend past west of 9th Street (See Figure 1).

## INSTITUTIONAL NEGLECT

Residents reported feeling like the city of Louisville had structurally disinvested from the West End. Damon stated: “[The West End] needs more structure for economic development. There needs to be more giving to the community, so people can be proud of their community” (Parkland, 3/6/2018). Lance similarly asserted: “The West End needs financial infrastructure... [It] needs some type of economic restitution on behalf of the city.” (Chickasaw, 7/10/2018). Devone conversely expressed: “I don’t believe that there are outside forces and outside resources that are going to come and save us, inside West Louisville. I think the solutions to improve West Louisville are ultimately going to come from the people who live in West Louisville” (Parkland, 9/4/2017).

Shelton additionally discussed this institutional neglect stating: “What kind of community is so deprived that we’re waiting on Walmart? What has happened, systematically, with policy makers, legislators, business people, private and public sector, that has left us so devastated that we’re literally waiting on Walmart like we’re waiting on Superman?...We should really be celebrating massive industry and movement coming into the community and not in a way that gentrifies the community and moves African Americans out but in a way that collectively goes in line with the community values...There’s ways to bring in commerce and not in a way that gentrify and disperse people. We have to pay attention to that” (California, 3/19/2018). While residents’ perspectives varied on whether change would come internally or externally, they all agreed that the West End needed assistance, yet wasn’t receiving it. This disinvestment further exemplifies a sense of community devaluation among residents.

The most commonly referenced way residents experienced disinvestment was through food insecurity. Interviewees specifically commented on the lack of accessible grocers in the West End. When asked if she felt like she had access to quality groceries and fresh produce, interview respondent #1 stated: “Oh no! We never—okay, my family, we never shop for our groceries on the West side of town, unless we really must. And I say this because there’s too much going on and the produce is high.” Several of the Instagram respondents mentioned the lack of appropriate food vendors in the area as well. Joseph, for example, stated:

You don’t see any vegetable or fruit stands. And guess what? All the chemicals in the food is killing us. They took the Pic Pac out and put a dollar store there. If you look at every corner, you see a dollar store. If it’s not a dollar store, it’s a pawn shop. If it’s not a pawn shop, you see a liquor store. Young people are getting raised on a bag of chips and cookies (Russell, 9/2/2017).



The literature refers to neighborhoods like the West End, without access to quality produce, as food deserts. Damon expressed his frustration with this desertion when reporting: “We need more sit-down restaurants and more than two Kroger [grocery] stores. When you drive in the West End, all you see is liquor stores, churches, and fast food spots” (Parkland, 3/16/2018). Lance echoed those sentiments claiming: “We need good, safe, healthy food options. Stores are far, I know that the city is trying to add stores and stuff. We don’t need nothing new. We just need an update on what we already got” (Chickasaw, 7/10/2018). Institutional neglect of the West End, particularly regarding grocery stores, has led many residents to believe that the city simply does not value that part of town nor the people who live there.

## VACANT PROPERTIES

Another major theme in the data was concern surrounding the physical and built environment. Vacant property was cited as a major issue. Many respondents linked vacant buildings with other problems in the community. For example, Damon noted: “The West End needs something to be done with these abandoned houses. We have a real drug problem and if you get rid of these abandoned houses, people wouldn’t have anywhere to hang out. Either tear these houses down or sell them off for a dollar” (Parkland, 3/16/2018). Shauna similarly questioned: “Why are there so many homeless people when there’s so many abandoned houses? You can turn these houses into something that could feed them, provide good hygiene, or just keep them up” (Russell, 1/25/2018). Evon addressed an additional aspect of the physical community when stating: “We want to clean up the trash in the streets...We want to engage the city to be a partner in this and provide more rotation in trash pick-up and supply more trash cans throughout the community. We want to get that investment in the area, so we can begin to put these vacant and abandoned properties back into play and be able to attract retailers and grow” (California, 2/21/2018). While Shauna, Damon and Evon proposed solutions, Lucious,

an older resident, pointed fingers. He recounted: “On 6th and Muhammed Ali [Blvd.], Blacks had the theaters and everything there. They had to eliminate all of that. It was Old Walnut Street. It was urban renewal. They renewed, alright” (Parkland, 9/8/2017). Lucious’ comment indicates frustration with the fact that the West End received vacant properties in return for promised renewal.

## NONEXISTENT RECREATION

Respondents also drew attention to the scarce recreational opportunities available in the West End. For instance, one Instagram post quoted Damon saying that “there has to be something for the kids to do. If the kids want to do something they have to go to the East or South sides. They need a center, a movie theater, skating rink, something constructive. The West End is a desert” (Parkland, 3/16/2018). Lance supported this claim noting: “The West End needs leisure activities. There’s no reason why I must drive 10-15 miles to go to a movie theater...There’s all these abandoned lots, all these abandoned places. Give us a paintball place” (Chickasaw, 7/10/2018).

Many respondents recognized the significance of community recreational spaces. DeBrion said: “If there was anything that I could do for the West End, I would rebuild the parks and the Boys & Girls Clubs back up. Man, when they took the Portland Boys & Girls clubs and they started taking a couple more and shutting them down and stuff, like the community center over here, that killed the hood. It just kills us. Instead of the kids going to the summer classes, they out here running around, doing whatever. It’s crazy” (Russell, 8/27/2017). Other respondents similarly acknowledged how the lack of structured leisure could lead to lawlessness. Will claimed: “The west needs more community centers because that’ll give the kids something to do...There’s nothing in the neighborhood for kids to go to or do anything productive. They have to find something to do because they’re bored, so they choose trouble” (Chickasaw, 5/30/2018). Te’Shawn Jr. agreed: “We need more clubs, like the Boys & Girls clubs. We need somewhere where we can hang out and it keeps us out of the



streets” (Russell, 5/10/2018). Through concerns of dissipated leisure activities, West End residents reveal the interconnected relationship between the physical attributes of a community and the social experiences within it. In this case specifically, vacant buildings and neglected public spaces have an impact on homelessness, recreation opportunities, and criminal activity.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study relied on data from 236 interviews to determine how Black residents in Louisville’s West End community perceive urban change. I found that residents experienced socio-cultural displacement, in four ways: through the white gaze, institutional neglect, vacant properties, and nonexistent recreation. Respondents identified community problems and, in some cases, articulated practical solutions. Louisville proves to be an interesting case—whereas many urban areas have long-lasting social and cultural amenities yet lack affordable housing, Louisville appears to be experiencing the opposite. Residents do not face as many obstacles securing housing yet are struggling to preserve local amenities which would make the quality of life in the West End worthwhile.

Altogether this study provides insights on how to better conceptualize displacement and implement preservation. Although affordability is an extremely timely issue in many metropolitan areas across the United States, the Louisville case illustrates that displacement is multifaceted, affecting social and cultural realities in addition to housing security. It’s important that discussions address all aspects of displacement moving forward. Further, preservationists presented with opportunities to restore value into a community must be intentional about ensuring that their efforts do not erase the social and cultural qualities inherent to the community. To avoid doing this, preservationists should include members of the community in the urban planning and renewal process. As the quotes referenced herein indicate, community members possess situated knowledge that would be extremely useful in facilitating redevelopment.

## REFERENCES

1. I draw on the capitalization practices of Kimberlé Crenshaw who stated, “I capitalize “Black” because Black people, like Asians, Latinos, and other ‘minorities,’ constitute a specific cultural group and, as such, require denotation as a proper noun. By the same token, I do not capitalize “white,” which is not a proper noun, since whites do not constitute a specific cultural group.” (1991:1244).
2. Polletta, Francesca and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 no. 1 (2018): 285.
3. Ibid, 584.
4. George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers) 243.
5. These citations provide the specific West End neighborhood location each respondent resides in as well as the date the digitized interview excerpts was posted on the @WestOfNinthLouisville Instagram account.

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# Low-Equity Co-ops in Harlem, NY

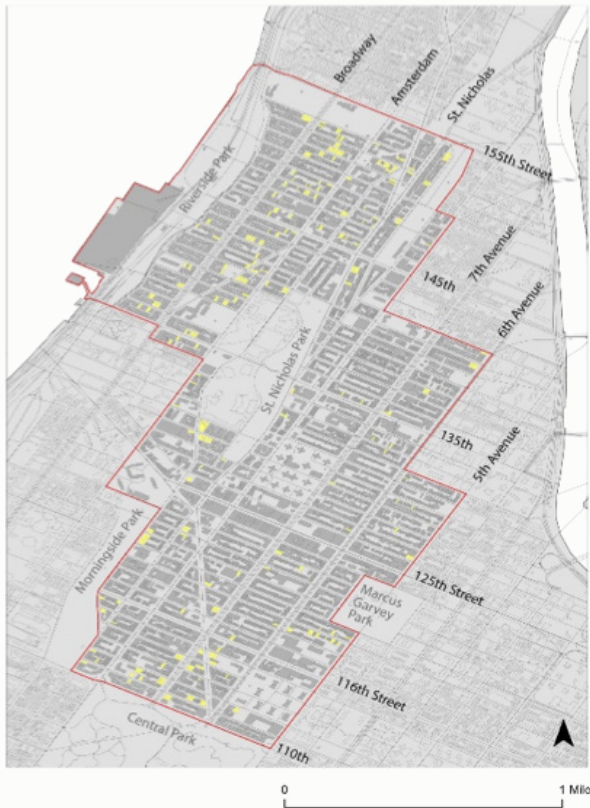
BY EMILY JUNKER

Low-equity cooperative housing has been considered a buffer against displacement for low-income people.<sup>1</sup> This case study explores a low-equity cooperative housing program in New York City and its role in preserving social and physical features of Harlem, a neighborhood in northern Manhattan. Harlem, for the purpose of this case study, is defined by the area shown in *Map 1* and represents the historically majority African American areas of Central and West Harlem.

In 1978, the newly founded New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) created the Tenant Interim Lease program (TIL).<sup>2</sup> TIL enabled tenants to organize as Housing Development Fund Corporations (HDFCs)<sup>3</sup> and thereby cooperatively own and rehabilitate foreclosed city-owned buildings as limited-equity cooperatives (co-ops). HDFC co-ops are intended to provide housing for

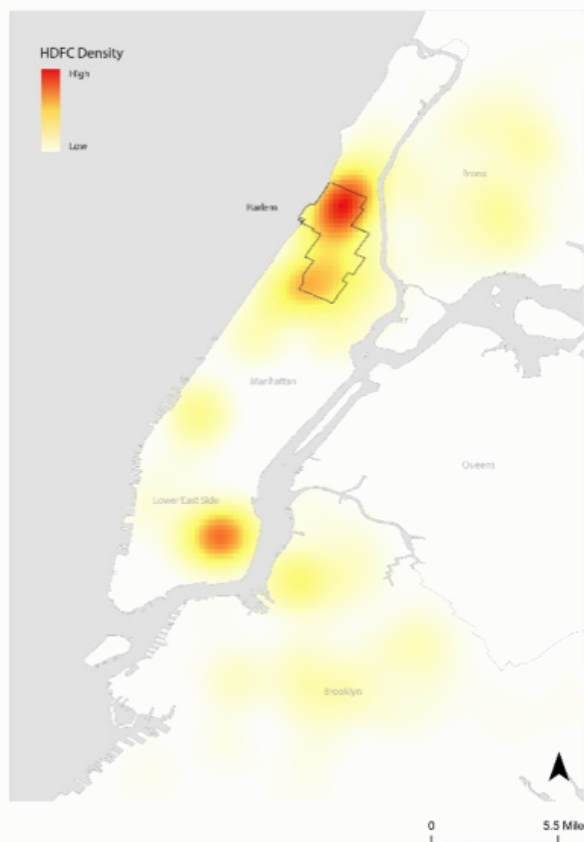
low-income people by restricting resale prices and incomes of prospective buyers. Today, the highest concentration of HDFC co-ops are in Harlem (see *Map 2*). In 2016, one fifth of HDFCs city-wide were in Harlem, and the majority were formed through TIL.<sup>4</sup>

Between 2000 and 2010, Harlem's demographics show an increasingly white and higher-income population. During that time the population of Harlem grew at the same rate as Manhattan,<sup>5</sup> yet the black population decreased from 63 to 53 percent, and the white population increased from 1 to 20 percent.<sup>6</sup> The Hispanic population of the area remained at 35 percent. The median income in inflation-adjusted dollars was \$32,600 in 2000 and increased to \$46,400 by 2010.<sup>7</sup> This has resulted in pressure on Harlem's rental housing market as low-income tenants are being priced out.



As the neighborhood undergoes rapid change, HDFCs have a unique role in enabling long-term owners to stay in place. However, they often do not provide ownership opportunities for new low- or moderate-income families, especially those from the neighborhood. Many African American and Hispanic families who were the original shareholders of HDFCs, or their children and grandchildren, still live in them. This is a testament to the role of co-op ownership as an important part of preserving communities. After a long period of disinvestment and abandonment through the second half of the 20th century, reinvestment has caused real estate to again be financially valuable in Harlem. Sales prices in HDFCs are close to or at market rates, and the number of HDFC apartment sales has more than doubled in the past few years.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this case study is to share various viewpoints about changes occurring in HDFCs as they have become a commodity in the real estate market, and to identify challenges for their preservation.<sup>9</sup> Preservation is measured in three ways. The first is the ability for long-time and current residents and their families to stay in their neighborhood, retaining social and cultural features of the neighborhood and their values of place. The second is the affordability of housing for existing and future HDFC residents. The third is the maintenance of the physical character of the neighborhood, which has been furthered by residents' care of these late 19th- and early 20th-century buildings and has ensured their survival.<sup>10</sup> While only representing a small percentage of buildings within the study area and city, residents of HDFCs value their homes and are the reason these resources have been preserved and can contribute to the affordability and significant social and built features of Harlem as a neighborhood. However, recent dynamics are threatening to change that.



**MAP 1** Harlem case study boundary  
HDFC cooperatives highlighted in yellow

**MAP 2** Kernel Density Map of HDFC hotspots  
Harlem case study area boundary





## THE FORMATION OF HDFCS IN HARLEM

HDFCs are most often found in neighborhoods that experienced similar processes of decline, and were populated by African Americans, Hispanics, and people of color.<sup>11</sup> After WWII, suburbanization, urban renewal, and the economic shift from manufacturing to service jobs had consequences on the city's tax base and employment, especially in working-class neighborhoods of color. In the 1970s, all levels of government cut spending in urban infrastructure and services. New York City was in a fiscal crisis and barely escaped bankruptcy in 1975. During this period, Harlem lost an estimated 48 percent of its population.<sup>12</sup> Rental buildings that were half vacant or populated by low-income people became unprofitable, and landlords abandoned them or ceased maintenance, while still collecting rent.<sup>13</sup> The cycle would repeat as new owners acquired the foreclosed buildings. In response, the city passed the 1976 *in rem* law which hastened foreclosures on buildings in arrears, transferred titles to the city, and made HPD the landlord.<sup>14</sup> By 1978, the growing inventory of city-owned buildings in low-income neighborhoods was 9,500, comprised of 40,000 occupied and 60,000 vacant apartments.<sup>15</sup>

In Harlem, residents and community groups worked to sustain safe housing.<sup>16</sup> Tenants formed associations to collect rent and run their buildings. The Urban Homesteading Assistance Board (UHAB) formed in 1973 as a professional planning response to advocate for residents.<sup>17</sup> UHAB advised the city in the formation of TIL—combining the city's aim to release itself as landlord from thousands of buildings, urban homesteaders' actions, and existing policy structures to allow residents to acquire shares of their buildings and a lease to their units for \$250. This price was blind to economic status, unit size, and family size. It only required tenants to demonstrate their ability to manage their building.<sup>18</sup> In the first three years, 111 buildings city wide completed TIL.<sup>19</sup>

TIL also bolstered residents' existing knowledge and leadership. As Oscar McDonald, a longtime UHAB organizer describes, "for the most part, these buildings are run by brown women [who] never imagined that they would be in the position to manage their building, in control of their destiny [...] people whose lives were controlled by other people and entities and government agencies."<sup>20</sup> Shareholders self-govern their HDFCs by a democratically elected board that manages the building operation and finances. James, an HDFC shareholder who has lived in his building for all 62 years of his life, described the optimism of TIL:

*[My mom] sat us all down and said, 'this is what's getting ready to transpire in Harlem.' [...] And basically, the tenants of the building took ownership—like a real corporation. And at that time, you were part of a full contingency of co-ops in Harlem. It also afforded us lower taxes, cheaper oil. Because we were all part of this consortium per se. And it was great, it was liberating to see what was coming, and you felt good, you felt proud.*<sup>21</sup>

The buildings were often in disrepair. Initially, the city committed to three repairs for each building, which typically included boiler and roof replacement. Shareholders were then responsible to take care of maintenance themselves. Although a heavy burden in the context of poverty, tenants were empowered to put sweat equity into stabilizing their housing and neighborhoods.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the physical aspects of these buildings have been maintained.





John, a Harlem native and resident of his building since 1964, pointing to his home which he helped form into an HDFC after going through the TIL program. Photo Taken March 25, 2019. [Photo by Emily Junker]

## THE END OF TIL

TIL was reliant on federal funding which quickly dried up when the Reagan administration took office in 1981. By the mid-1990s, the increasingly desperate state of buildings required the city to commit to gut rehabilitation and to provide relocation to tenants during construction.<sup>23</sup> The costs became inhibitive, and the city stopped taking title of buildings in 1990. In 1994, to quickly remove all buildings from city ownership, HPD introduced a third-party transfer system. The system privatized ownership, management and sale of in rem properties. In 2006, the development portion of TIL was ended. Dozens of buildings still in TIL but not yet HDFCs were left waiting until 2012 when HPD created the Affordable Neighborhood Cooperative Program (ANCP) to guide those buildings with much more stringent regulations.<sup>24</sup>

## AFFORDABILITY FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE RESIDENTS

Today, HDFCs continue to provide affordable housing to their residents, but each building has its own challenges. In some buildings, maintenance fees cannot be raised because residents don't make enough money. In 2018, 28 percent of HDFCs were distressed and in serious municipal arrears and thus threatened by foreclosure.<sup>25</sup> However, for most HDFCs, maintenance fees remain more affordable than renting. HDFC residents said that they wouldn't be able to rent elsewhere in Harlem or to buy in another co-op. Monica, 44, was raised in her Harlem HDFC. She and her husband described their family's experience with renting:



We moved uptown [in Harlem] and then that is when you started to notice the difference and say, ‘I need to be back where I came from.’ [Uptown] rent was \$772 for a two-bedroom, nice apartment, but after two years, it changes, we were paying almost \$1,200. We came back here, and my mother’s maintenance was still \$454 at the time. So as far as affordability, it does supply affordability [...] The problem is that it is hard for outsiders to get in that would need that kind of affordability, like first-time homeowners.<sup>26</sup>

Her observation is illustrative of the lack of affordable homeownership opportunities for Harleimers. While HDFCs have income and price restrictions, these do not always serve the demographics of the long-term or generational residents of neighborhoods they were created in.

HDFCs have several means of restricting the resale price, including restrictions written into HDFC certificates of incorporation, temporal regulatory agreements,<sup>27</sup> and the New York State Private Housing Finance Law.<sup>28</sup> Temporal regulatory agreements discourage sales by making individual profits unfavorable with capping prices and higher flip-taxes. Flip-tax is paid to the co-op when a tenant sells their shares and moves out, allotting a substantial portion of profits to the HDFC.<sup>29</sup> However, once the regulatory agreements expire, the HDFCs aren’t required to sign another unless they choose to take a loan from the city. Certificate of incorporation typically follow the stipulations of the law, however co-ops formed at different times have different rules. At the time that the TIL program was created, it was not foreseen that these neighborhoods would become desirable to an outside real estate market.

The New York State Private Housing Finance Law states that HDFCs are “organized exclusively to develop a housing project for persons of low income,”<sup>30</sup> yet does not clearly define what *low income* means. Low income persons or families are defined as those “who are in the low income groups and who cannot afford to pay enough to cause private enterprise in their municipality to build a sufficient supply of adequate, safe and sanitary dwellings.”<sup>31</sup> This law restricts that “dwellings in any such project shall be available for persons or families whose probable aggregate annual income does not exceed six times the rental (including the value or cost to them of heat, light, water and cooking fuel) of the dwellings to be furnished such persons or families, except that in the case of persons or families with three or more dependents, such ratio shall not exceed seven to one.”<sup>32</sup> However, HPD, with its power as supervising agency of HDFCs, has distributed confusing information, defining *low income* for HDFCs as homebuyers earning up to 165 percent of Area Median Income (AMI).<sup>33</sup> However, 165 percent of AMI was \$120,000 for a single person in 2018, while in Harlem, the median household income was about \$48,800 for an average household size of 2.6 in 2017.<sup>34</sup> This also conflicts with HPD’s webpage that defines low income as under 80% of AMI and middle-income as 120 percent to 165 percent of AMI.<sup>35</sup>

The lack of clarity has resulted in some inappropriately high sales. These sales have been useful to some HDFCs that have fallen behind on tax payments, water bills, or have encountered large costs for necessary repairs. A high-priced sale with a good flip tax can bring them out of the red. In addition, a high return on a shareholder’s initial investment has offered some the choice to sell and move away. Reasons that shareholders chose to move included expanding family size, aging and retirement, disabilities not accommodated by walk-up buildings, or to buy a house in the suburbs or south. Nonetheless, most HDFC residents value their homes for non-financial reasons and for the opportunities the stability of low-cost housing provides.

## WHO IS BUYING?

Demographic change within HDFC buildings presents questions of who this housing is for and who can have a fair chance to get access to this resource. There is an understanding by some in Harlem that the HDFCs were created by and for minorities. The HDFCs have come to reflect racial tensions between long-term residents and predominantly white newcomers buying into the co-ops. The turnover is often described as exploitative of co-op shareholders who occupied, defended, and improved buildings. As Oscar McDonald at UHAB explained:

These co-ops were built on community, and people working together, and sweat equity, and people cooperating [...] Sometimes gentrifiers are not interested and there is this wall built up and the wall is too thick for people to really come together as a community and work together. [...] The whole idea of this particular—this set of housing is damaged by moving forward the wrong way. Of course, there is the right way to do it, we don't want to remain a segregated city, obviously not, but there are certain things that have to be in place and some diplomacy and some enlightenment and understanding of each other to integrate housing the right way. Economic integration does not necessarily equal gentrification.<sup>36</sup>

On one hand, there are protections mandating that who lives in a building cannot be restricted by race, even if for the purpose of retaining Harlem's communities of color. On the other hand, because of structural racism, the opportunity to live and own in NYC is not equal; there's a racial wealth gap.

Kim, a Harlem native, was fortunate to be able to buy into her Harlem HDFC in 2008. Through her



Kim, a Harlem native, was able to buy into a Harlem HDFC Co-op in 2008 through a rare opportunity.  
[Photo by Emily Junker, March 31, 2019]

diligence in seeking affordable home-ownership opportunities, she found a rare offer to buy in an HDFC with a restricted sales price and an income cap. With the help of a loan from Carver National Bank, which had a community-based model of lending to Harlem residents despite the 2008 foreclosure crisis, Kim bought her apartment. Kim explained how through her quest for home ownership she saw first-hand how discriminatory policies and racial wealth gaps of the past continue to have ramifications today:

Just to talk about the issue of wealth. Because of redlining, and the opportunity to build wealth generations ago were not really in place for the majority of African Americans [...] If it's someone like me, a single parent, I make a decent income by any standard, still, I don't have access to that wealth. One of the effects of redlining is that it created this racial wealth gap that is persistent until today. I can't go to my parents. They don't have money they can lend me to help me put a down payment on a market-rate unit that I could then build some wealth on.<sup>37</sup>





## CHANGING RULES AND SHAREHOLDERS' RESPONSES

With these dynamics at play, the city is concerned about the loss of this affordable housing resource and the lack of oversight in management. As Christine Retzlaff O'Connell, director of ANCP said, the city has learned over the years and has adjusted the program accordingly, generally adding more restrictions to keep the co-ops affordable.<sup>38</sup> Tighter restrictions on more recently formed co-ops have enabled some lower-priced sales.


In 2016, the city tried to pass a regulatory agreement that introduced several stipulations.<sup>39</sup> In reaction to the high sales volume, the proposed agreement would further restrict the resale value and buyer's income to under 120 percent of AMI—the moderate-income threshold—in addition to restricting buyers based on their assets. While not mandatory to sign, as an incentive the city offered a limited renewal of the DAMP tax abatement that uses ceilings and caps to keep HDFC expenses low.<sup>40</sup> This benefit is set to expire in 2029. Some HDFC residents take issue with the stipulations in the regulatory agreement that require city-approved monitors and managers to oversee the operation of HDFCs. This takes away autonomy from HDFCs and would be an additional expense. The new agreement proposed different restrictions for those who bought into their apartments more recently and those who bought them through TIL. Without denying the help and support that some HDFCs could use, the city's approach came off as punitive to HDFC shareholders, who were left with a huge task to maintain and manage their buildings in the context of poverty.<sup>41</sup> But, from some shareholders' perspectives, this creates a situation where the potential equity they could gain from sales is diminished for the sake of preserving moderately affordable housing for future residents. The city is “changing the rules” on shareholders.<sup>42</sup>

William, Harlem resident since 1964, strongly stated how he considers his stake in the neighborhood as just as much or more of an investment than the high price new buyers pay: “Whatever the circumstances are, their being able to pay more, doesn't diminish my investment because when I took the investment and stayed here, you wouldn't have come here. So that is my payment for staying here, going through all this stuff, taking it off your [the city's] hands when there wasn't no tax roll,”<sup>43</sup> referencing the 1970s and 1980s when most whites would not live in or visit the neighborhood.

Following dissent from the HDFC Coalition, and from the advice of UHAB, the city level regulatory agreement did not move forward. However, the expiration of the DAMP tax abatement in 2029 and the lack of clarity for HDFCs will necessitate some change. In 2020, a series of drafted state level bills could amend the Private Housing Finance Law in the near future.<sup>44</sup> Generally, the goals of these amendments reflect the desire of the city and state to preserve affordability long-term, ensure that internal disputes in HDFCs are resolved, and extend the tax benefits for those that meet the affordability thresholds.<sup>45</sup> Balancing these changes with the variety of buildings and shareholders' points of view will be a continued challenge.

## MOVING FORWARD

African American and Hispanic HDFC shareholders invested in the preservation of Harlem's community, affordability, and built environment. Following the initial actions of these communities, the city created the TIL program which gave them the legal means to attain title to their buildings and form tenant-controlled cooperatives with the support of UHAB and others. In doing so, they prevented their buildings and neighborhoods from deteriorating further. HDFC residents kept housing affordable for themselves and allowed long-term and multi-generational African American and Hispanic residents to live in Harlem.




However, with the onset of neighborhood change, this form of housing is influenced by market forces in ways that challenge its continued affordability and community model, especially for Harleimers. The increase in sales prices are changing the demographic that these buildings serve, and newly proposed regulations are coming at a time when affordable housing is already in crisis.

Most importantly, some residents feel that their investment is being devalued, their self-governing powers are being superseded, and their housing security and equity are being threatened. The knowledge and experience of HDFC shareholders as well as increased outreach and support to those in trouble are crucial in formulating any new regulations to help HDFCs thrive and to achieve the goal of preserving affordability in the long run.

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# “Cain’t Nobody Live Like This”

## Economic Crises and Urban Change in Oakland, California

BY STEPHANIE DELISE JONES

The intersection of Lakeshore Ave. and E 18th Street used to be the dividing point of Lake Merritt. Facing north was a panoramic view of the glistening lake, which divides the bustling financial buildings of downtown Oakland and the community around the lake that begins the East Oakland hills. The buildings facing the Lake have large windows for residents to soak in the views of the Oakland skyline and runners use the lake as a scenic exercise opportunity. Facing East, you used to be able to see the beginnings of a densely populated Black and Latinx community full of life. The residents of East 18th and Foothill Boulevard live on a tight grid that gives them easy access to downtown and the rest of the city. The buildings that were once there have now been redeveloped or replaced with newly renovated soft story buildings. The top of East 14th, which connects the Lake Merritt community to the rest of East Oakland and the cities to the south, including San Leandro and Hayward, has now been completely remade.

Oakland, California holds a particular place in the Black imagination. From the Great Migration, the heavy influences of southern culture on the jazz culture, civil and labor rights fights that have been fought and won, the Black Panther party and the war waged on its members by the police, and the influences of the CIA bringing on the crack epidemic, to the vibrant creation of the Hyphy movement, all have gained Oakland national attention. The current wave of gentrification efforts in Oakland have been particularly disparaging and the ironic methodical purging of Blackness from a city that has long been associated with Black liberation movements, history, and culture has not been lost upon Oakland residents. There are many points throughout Oakland’s history where one could begin talking about housing inequity issues, however, the most pivotal in this moment is 2008.



The 2008 financial crisis was one of the biggest shifts of wealth away from the Black community in the last few decades. In fact, reports suggest that over half of the wealth accumulated was lost and the racial wealth gap has only increased since the crisis. The predatory practices by banks, such as Wells Fargo, resulted in an acute impact upon Black communities.<sup>1</sup> Oakland was not an exception to this rule.<sup>2</sup> In fact, “Between 2007 and 2011, one in seven Oakland mortgages entered default, with one in 14 eventually lost to foreclosure.”<sup>3</sup> Because of the history of racial and economic segregation, which has sustained the Flats of Oakland as Black, Latinx and Asian communities; this disproportionately impacted non-white communities.

Longtime East Oakland resident Montrel Washington has had a front seat to these drastic changes.<sup>4</sup> As Montrel recounts:

It was like you had nobody keeping they house here. I mean, after ‘08, it was a wrap. They didn’t even have no time either. One year, we was kicking it, and the next everybody was gone. Antioch, Pittsburg... you know. And the city didn’t even do nothing. I knew they were supposed to, like, help, you know. They had some money, but it didn’t go nowhere. So then, it was just over.

Montrel and I spoke for 20 minutes about the housing crisis. His understanding of the changes was highlighted in his continued disbelief of what unfolded in the aftermath of the Great Recession, as he still was in awe of the massive dispossession. He continued to make the comparisons between the “then,” a distant memory of how Oakland was shaped, and the “now,” a completely new city that had transformed around him. He pointed to a newer development that was only 20 or so feet from his home. “How much you think it cost to build this? How much you think this spot even cost [for the city]? I ain’t moved and I don’t even know where I am. This shit is crazy.”

## REFLECTING ON CRISIS

Housing issues necessarily invoke politics of space. Politics of space are about social order and attempts to challenge or reproduce that order. Considering the ordering of neighborhood models of space have been shown to be strongly connected to the understanding of housing inequality, social mobility and claims made by people within spaces for the trajectory and historic roots of their city. Theoretically urban scholars have long discussed the dimensions for how people begin to make claims for spaces and how spaces begin to be categorized as “belonging” to a particular group. Unfortunately, trends in changes to the urban landscape tend to harm marginalized communities in detrimental ways that lasts for generations.

When the bursting of the housing bubble began to demonstrate all the ways it impacted Black families and households, the effects were catastrophic in Oakland because of the neighborhood patterns of segregation that already existed. As Masy and Denton characterize it, “If racial segregation concentrates poverty in space, it also focuses and amplifies any *change* in the economic situation of blacks. In a segregated environment, any economic shock that causes a downward shift in the distribution of black income will not only bring about an increase in the poverty rate for the group as a whole; it will also cause an increase in the geographic concentration of poverty.”<sup>5</sup> This concentration for Oakland resulted in the degeneration of communities that were already neglected and struggling. East and West Oakland were specific targets of this economic shift, thus when people begin to lose their housing, these are the communities where the issues were the most concentrated. This is what people have termed as the crisis of 2008. This crisis created the opportunity for investors to step in and begin changing the urban landscape.

Gentrification models are responses to a regional crisis, which is inherently linked to surplus. Oakland, once a largely working-class community, has now been changed by a “technicraft economy” that has exploded as a response to the housing crisis of 2008. Geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore advances:



Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz provide a useful definition of crisis. ‘Crises occur when the social formation can no longer be reproduced on the basis of the pre-existing system of social relations’ (96). The pivotal verb ‘to reproduce’ signifies the broad array of political, economic, cultural, and biological capacities a society uses to renew itself, daily, seasonally, generationally. Crisis is not objectively bad or good; rather, it signals systemic change whose outcome is determined through struggle. Struggle, which is a politically neutral word, occurs at all levels of a society as people try to figure out, through trial error, what to make of idled capacities.

Crisis allows for a new social order to be created and new imaginaries to take form. In a healthy economy, these allow for new and creative ways to produce capital. As Gilmore suggests, “in fancy terms, this means that implicit in capital’s imperative to accumulate is an equal necessity to disaccumulate. Systemic failure to disaccumulation constitutes crisis.”<sup>6</sup> Crisis is the result of an over accumulation of surplus. Although, surplus is necessary to create profit, too much of it results in idle capacities. Our consumer-based economy is built on cyclical breakdowns, thus is inherently unstable.<sup>7</sup> These periods of lows or recessions have no limit to how much harm they create. Thus, in periods of slump, profit is not being made and poverty sweeps through communities.


Gilmore advances four types of surplus. These include surplus land, relative surplus population, surplus finance capital and surplus state capacity. The first two types of surplus both highlight the state’s need to control the land. First, land surplus is an abundance of land either not in use or not producing profit. Then there is surplus finance capital, where the state attempts to solve

economic problems by creating public markets for private capital. The third type of relative surplus is focused on how the state must control its population. The Great Migration of residents from the southern states and the diversity of immigrants and migrants both coming into California led the population to be both robust and diverse. For example, during the Second Great Migration alone, more than five million people moved to throughout the U.S., including California where, Los Angeles, Richmond, Long Beach, and Oakland were main attractions as they offered well-paying jobs in the defense industry. The fourth crisis type is surplus state capacity, since “the capitalist state must both help capital be profitable and keep the formal inequality of capitalism acceptable to polity, it develops fiscal, institutional and ideological means to carry out these tasks.”<sup>8</sup>

During a housing crisis, the solution of tech is both profitable and ideologically viable. The relocating (read displacement) of the Black population is on par with the levels and severity of racial and class inequality that produced the segregation that Oakland residents already experienced. East and West Oakland have historically been the landing grounds for non-white communities. These neighborhoods have also been historically working class and highly isolated. Thus, once the housing crisis affected these neighborhoods, the economic downturn resulted in the removal of these communities.

## **SURPLUS AND CRISIS IN OAKLAND**

There are two city ordinances that apply both to land and low-income housing. These ordinances were revised by the Community & Economic Development Committee on 12/2/2014 and the Oakland City Council on 12/9/2015.<sup>9</sup> In order to comply with these ordinances steps have to be taken by the city that ensure low-income residents have an opportunity to gain access to housing. The activist responsible for getting the city to grant and support these ordinances fought to ensure that the land Oakland was selling would not be



used as a means to sell to investors that would increase gentrification. Amid the housing crisis, there is a lack of response by the city to act on the enforcement of the ordinances to new investors or act on ensuring they have taken the necessary steps to follow through with these municipal codes.

The Eastlake United for Justice members challenged selling a 12th street parcel. Public Advocates, a nonprofit advocate group in Oakland, submitted a letter addressed to then-President Lynette Gibson McElhaney and the additional members of the Oakland City Council to alert them of their noncompliance with the Surplus Lands Act (of the state of California), Oakland's General Plan and Oakland's Municipal Code. The document details how each of these laws are applicable as well as how they should be applied to this particular property. In the documents the team states:

It is unclear whether the City complied with any of these procedural requirements. On the contrary, it appears that 'staff issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to those developers who had shown interest in the Property.' The City Administrator and City Council's failure to take the necessary procedural steps would put the City out of compliance with Ordinance No. 13287 and its predecessor, Ordinance No. 13185 (July 2013) as well as the City's Housing Element.

The closing of the letter reads:

Finally, state law also forbids local governments in "the enactment or administration of ordinances from taking any action to prohibit any residential development because "of the method of financing" or because" the development... is intended for occupancy by persons and families of very low, low, or moderate...." To the extent that the City discourage affordable housing, prioritized luxury housing over affordable housing or refused to consider affordable housing during its disposition process, it would be in violation of this requirement.

They also produced a checklist for the compliance with the Surplus Land Act in order to clarify how to be observe these laws.

I spoke with a longtime advocate and activist Mr. Allen West about this issue in particular. Mr. West's work has focused specifically on housing in Oakland with a goal of protecting marginalized people in the community. Mr. West states:

That's why the city got sued over that 12th street property. They are supposed to be designating that land to low income property. But they clearly aren't. It's such a shame. And then you have all these people leaving with people here who don't know their history. When people don't know their history, it's like sending someone to a fight with a gun with no bullets in it.

In a breaking news story that Darwin Bond Graham with the East Bay Express wrote about the 12th street victory:





On Tuesday, Oakland quietly issued a ‘notice of intent and offer to convey property’ for the 12th Street Remainder Parcel, the acre of land near Lake Merritt that until recently was slated to become a 300-unit luxury apartment tower. Under the Surplus Land Act, Oakland was required to first offer the site to affordable housing developers, but the city instead issued a private RFP to three companies seeking to build luxury housing on the site. The report also suggests that Oakland was not doing all it could to advertise this property to interested parties.

On the Facebook page Save the E12th Street for the People July 17th, 2016 the organizers representing the East Lake Community posted:

We’ve been at the land each night during this week of action to Stop Stay Expand. Last night centered on health and wellness and the previous night we talked about building our own solutions. Thank you all for building with us! See you at the march today.

I spoke with Delano, an activist of the East Lake Community, who stated:

People in Oakland ain’t never been no punks man. Ever. When we see some shit that’s foul we willing to call that shit out. 12th street was one of them times. What’s wild is that you got all these people trying to work to keep they neighborhood together and that

lazy ass council won’t lift a finger to serve the people they need to. They don’t even know what’s going on around her man. This is clear neglect. Neglect by the [city] council to have the respect and responsibility to work for the people they serve. When we go try and hit them with it they ignore us. They tell us ‘its nothing we can do’. Who signing these permits? Who signing these building off. They gotta come through you. And we know they come through you because if they come through us they would have to go.

## THE RESPONSE TO THE HOUSING CRISIS

Mayor Jerry Brown’s 10k Program was designed to bring 10,000 new residents to Downtown Oakland. Brown implemented his plan by building approximately 6,500 condos, lofts, and apartments, most of them designed for affluent urbanites. He hoped to attract ten thousand new residents to the city’s dreary downtown and transform it into a vibrant retail destination.<sup>10</sup> The plan fell extremely short because of the financial crisis of 2008.<sup>11</sup> By 2010, the unemployment rate in Oakland reached 16 percent. East Bay Alliance for Sustainable Economy (EBASE) 2010 report found “census tracts 4015 and 4016 in West Oakland had unemployment rates of 44 percent and 45 percent respectively, while Census tracts 4088 and 4087 in East Oakland had unemployment rates of 35 percent and 31 percent respectively.”<sup>12</sup> Between 2008 and 2014, East and West Oakland homeowners were selling their homes to developers, many of them relocating to the suburb of Antioch. In 2016, there was a huge disparity in eviction notices, with an increase of 46 percent in the city of Oakland. A City of Oakland Equity Indicators 2018 report found:





Majority African American census tracts had the highest rates of eviction notices (141.6 per 1,000 renter-occupied housing units). This rate was much higher than the rate for majority Asian census tracts (17.4 per 1,000). The rates for majority White census tracts (41.0 per 1,000) and majority Latino census tracts (66.2 per 1,000) fell in the middle. Citywide, 72.7 eviction notices were filed per 1,000 renter-occupied housing units in 2016. Renter-occupied housing units in majority African American census tracts were 8.14 times more likely to receive eviction notices than renter-occupied housing units in majority Asian census tracts.

I sat down with a high school teacher and community member named Rashawn to discuss his experience with Oakland's increasing pressure on to the renting community in Oakland. He described the pressure he feels in his own home.

**Rashawn:** I moved to Berkeley in August 2006 to start a Ph.D. program at UC Berkeley. Surprisingly, my rent was lower than what I paid in Manhattan. But, of course, I could only afford to live with housemates. In Berkeley I signed a one-year lease on a four-bedroom apartment along with three graduate students in the Energy Resources Group Master's program. As a "fully funded" graduate student for three years earning about \$18,000, a third of my monthly income went to housing costs. Fortunately, living with three energy-conscious students

kept our water and gas/electricity bills low; our landlord picked up the tab for garbage collection. About two years later, I moved to a three-bedroom apartment, another shared lease apartment in downtown Oakland. It was probably around the initial wave of art gallery happenings or First Friday; back when the events were confined to the side streets (24th and 25th). So, Oakland's art renaissance was rather nascent. It was also during the foreclosure crisis.

The owner of our apartment had purchased and renovated two joined row houses, splitting each into three-bedroom units. He couldn't afford to flip and sell, so he renovated and rented them out. It worked for me. I was paying about the same in rent; I just gained downtown Oakland as my playground. So, my housemates and I were pretty jazzed about the area. Our new landlord required that we pay for all utilities, including trash. You wouldn't believe how much trash has gone up in these ten years. But that's another story.

I've been in the same location in Chinatown section of downtown Oakland for about ten years, and, for most of that time, I lived primarily on a graduate student yearly salary of about \$19,000 with an extra thousand or so picked up from music gigs. I've watched the price of our rent slowly increase from its original August 2008 level of \$1,950 to today's price



at \$2,500. We don't split it evenly. But, nowadays, my share of rent and utilities is about \$800. I think we're lucky. Granted, none of my housemates nor I could consider buying a home in the Bay Area. Our options would be severely limited to the ex-urbs. And with today's insane traffic, our commutes to work would increase to obscene amounts. But we're also stuck. We can't afford to lose our rental apartment and expect to live in the same area for the same price. Prices have doubled or tripled. So, in the meanwhile, unless we totally quit the area or trade in for far more lucrative jobs...or worse, marry for money, we are in a weird financial limbo.

I'm still working on my doctorate while teaching at wealthy independent school, one of my housemates has left her career field and gone back to school, and the other has worked as an independent schoolteacher for about twelve years. His salary has slowly increased, commensurate with his years in teaching, but at independent schools the increases are nothing compared to public school teachers. Although, they don't fair that much better. Any rent increase is bound to send us into a sticker shock. This year our landlord wants to increase our rent by 12 percent on account of a 400 percent increase in his homeowner's insurance premiums. With every annual increase, we ask "How long can we really hold on to this rental spot?" People who have houses; their money goes toward

purchasing something to own. We're just throwing our money away. It's strange a feeling. On top of that, this past June our owner decided to move into one of the vacant bedrooms, unannounced. He literally moved in during the dead of night. So, as time goes on, there's a fear that one day he may be tempted to sell, or occupy the whole building, or vacate us, wait for a bit, and then jack up the rent prices to market levels. Then what? We know plenty of friends who have moved out of the area simply because they couldn't afford the rent—usually because they lost their lease or the owner sold or something catastrophic. You know those doomsday clocks that countdown to nuclear annihilation of the planet? That's how I feel about our housing situation in the East Bay. It's only a matter of time until everything explodes. Once your housing is gone, everything suffers.

Here we can see the scale of the increase in the jump of housing prices that resulted in locking out many residents of the city to be able to find affordable housing.

An important aspect of understanding how affordable housing can change drastically is understanding the definition of "affordable." Currently low income in Oakland is defined as someone making \$110,000 a year. Close to 40 percent of the city does not make over \$70,000 a year. Thus, as new developments are being added to the city landscape the adherence to the Oakland Municipal codes become incredibly superfluous. What is considered low income is out of reach for many Oakland residents, requiring that many people cover the cost of housing by seeking assistance from others who can help buffer the cost.

## TECHNOCRAT ECONOMY

Recent reports have the low income in Oakland somewhere in between \$105,000 - \$117,000 a year. The newly renovated properties have monthly rent from \$2,000 - \$4,000 for a two-bedroom apartment. Meaning the cost of living in Oakland is higher than many people can afford. Many residents in Oakland are spending more than 50 percent of their income to rent alone. Anywhere I went (bars, restaurants, BART, bus stops, etc.) people would talk about housing or the lack of affordable housing, largely unprompted. On a BART train headed to East Oakland, I chatted with Danita, a direct service worker who works at a nonprofit serving children. She described to me the feeling of being trapped:

**Danita:** It's getting harder for everything. The bus system has changed and changed... and changed. Now I'm taking three buses for the kids and then I gotta get to work. I'm not even worried about the cost—well I mean you know. It's just a hassle and it doesn't make sense.

**Me:** What about our folks though? What's being done there?

**Danita:** I mean the teachers are fighting the good fight. Don't sleep on the teachers in Oakland. All of them go down to City Hall and hand the council their asses. Oh and Marshawn [Lynch] is doing so much. My son went to one of his camps. One of the things about Marshawn [Lynch] that is so beautiful is how giving he is to the Oakland community. He is so rooted in the Oakland community. He does not have a celebrity life – he's like the same guy he was in high school. He still hangs out with the same people he grew up with. He came back and opened a store where he hires people from the community. One of the few things that haven't changed in Oakland.



Image 1. West MacArthur Boulevard house to be relocated.  
[Photo by Stephanie Jones]

I sat down with an Oakland city official (OCO) to discuss the homeless crisis in Oakland that has grown in the wake of gentrification. I asked about the homeless population in Oakland:

**OCO:** Well what we do know is that the population is mostly African American and mostly male. They are also mostly from Alameda county—so all those whispers about them coming from everywhere else just aren't true.

**Me:** How are the nonprofits feeling the pressure from an increase homeless population?

**OCO:** Well of course they are most swamped. They are doing so much more with less. Also, the nonprofits want to help—they continue to take on more and more with no increased funding coming their way.

**Me:** And what about the workers? Are they getting a pay increase as the demands are intensifying?

**OCO:** Actually no. The nonprofit workers have yet to receive a cost of living increase.

**Me:** Wait... at all?

**OCO:** No. Not at all. They haven't received anything. I don't know how they are managing.

## PAVING PARADISE

The old for the new is the general trend. New bars and cafes drift throughout downtown as more people demand new spaces.

In September of 1993 part of Oakland's General Plan for Historic Preservation Element included policy for relocation. The policy reads as follows:

**Policy 3.7: Property Relocation Rather Than Demolition as Part of Discretionary Projects:** As a condition of approval for all discretionary projects involving demolition of existing or Potential Designated Historic Properties, the City will normally require that reasonable efforts be made to relocate the properties to an acceptable site.

West MacArthur Boulevard houses a few of those properties. On one side of the street sits a row of historic homes. Image 1 is an example of one of the homes on this street. Each of these homes has a large yellow sign draped across the front letting passers know that they are up for sale. The sign states "These houses must be removed to accommodate construction of a new apartment complex. Pursuant to Policy 3.7 of the City of Oakland General Plan Historic Preservation Element, the Developer is offering this house for a nominal fee of \$1 to any person who can relocate it from this location." Policy 3.7 of the General Plan also states:

The policy is already partly implemented as a standard condition of approval for most projects involving zoning permits and removal of any residential building. Under this condition, the applicant is normally released from





the relocation requirement after 90 days if the applicant demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Director of City Planning that all reasonable efforts have been made to relocate the building and that these efforts have been unsuccessful.

This area has been designated as a Zone CN-3, which means: “The intent of the CN-3 Zone is to create, improve, and enhance area as neighborhood commercial centers that have a compact, vibrant pedestrian environment.”

Walking through this neighborhood, you see a space in transition. There is a mixture of new business, old single-family homes and homeless people collecting cans. Under the freeways of West Oakland are multiple homeless camps where people live in tents and sleep on blankets. I spoke with one homeless woman who stressed to me the importance of social services.

It ain't like people don't have no sense. We just fell off. I was evicted three times, before I got here. Just couldn't make do. That's all. Couldn't make do. You do a little something here and there to get some change. And you can come up like that. Then they talk[ed] about going up and up and up [in rent]. How you 'sposed to make that. It was hard already.

Many people when they talk about gentrification, the focus stays on the level of the individual. Some see the newcomers as invaders in their homelands. Others have gone as far as to compare gentrification with colonization. I wondered how many of these newcomers were fairing in such a tumultuous market and how their standard of living was improving. The best place to meet people is downtown Oakland (or Uptown as it is now

renamed). The new bar scene is vibrant. From the wallpaper to the fake candles, there is a freshness to the incoming businesses that have grown through this period.

One instance I stood next to a person at bar who later introduced themselves as Dale. We discussed his move from Houston and his plans as a new Oakland resident.

**Dale:** I like it. It's really nice. The people are nice. It's not as hot as Houston. But it's cool. I like the Lake. I probably go there every weekend. But, it's expensive. I'm paying like 80 times more than when I lived in Houston.

**Me:** What do you do?

**Dale:** I'm a service representative.

**Me:** Does that pay well?

**Dale:** Well... I mean... you know. It pays. But I'm not really tripping. I'm trying to get a tech job.

**Me:** You didn't move here with a Tech job?

**Dale:** No, but I'm interviewing.

**Me:** Who do you live with?

**Dale:** Right now I live with my girl and 5 other people in an apartment. I think we each pay \$1,350.

**Me:** Is it a three bedroom?

**Dale:** Yea, and we have our own bathroom. It works until we have kids I guess.



**Me:** I mean, when you move somewhere there's always a transition period.

**Dale:** I mean, but we're not going to stay here. We're probably going to be here about 3 years. Then I plan on going back to Houston.

**Me:** Why won't you stay?

**Dale:** Can't, and I mean caint, nobody live like this. I mean, it's soo high. I know so many people that moved to San Francisco and then came to Oakland and are thinking about moving to Richmond or something. It's too rough.

This conversation was not unique. I heard this story over and over again as I interviewed new residents of Oakland. Many of them expect their salaries to stretch much further than they do.

## THE PUSH BACK

The Oakland teacher strike lasted seven days. After two years of failed negotiations, many veteran teachers took the lead in declaring they were ready for the next steps to prove to the district that they were no longer going to compromise their own stability while also dealing with the needs of the students in their classrooms. The teachers held protests in front of each Oakland public high school, marched in front of the district in downtown Oakland and held a rally in Oscar Grant Plaza. The strike is classically rooted in the Black Radical Tradition and Black political engagement related to education.

Oakland Teachers Striking is not unheard of. Most people who grew up in the Bay Area can recall at least one Oakland Teacher's Strike per decade of their lives. This most recent strike was particularly impactful because the conversation around it contextualized teacher demands within the rising costs of living in the Bay Area. Discussions about the classroom were really discussions about the community at large. It was not a contract issue, but it highlighted how the district did not respond to teacher needs and demands. To understand and analyze the strike, therefore, it is important to briefly summarize Oakland's larger political moment.

Teachers, especially veterans, have a big presence in City Hall and are influential within local politics. Oakland schools have a lot of veteran teachers that are like legacies in the community. That they have taught multiple generations of students is a big deal. They are powerful forces in how education is organized and the district decisions. Their work carries weight for how education is supposed to be done in Oakland.

Even without this influence, teachers—as a category of workers—have to set standards for how the community responds to them and the types of responsibilities that any community has to its teachers is incredibly important. It is important not only because of the amount of time they spend with students, but also because of the impact good teachers and education systems can have on communities as a whole. Matriculation into the workforce depends on it. In particular the school site, then, is a site of contention over how conversations are supposed to be facilitated. The community looks to the schools as a facilitator who outlines ways to hold the district accountable.

Because of the corruption and mismanagement at the district level there is a continued miscommunication of how much money there is and what the goals are and what the relationships to the community needs to be. The mismanagement and corruption in the district lead to a stifled flow of communication. The district is not as transparent with the community as it should be. It is disruptive because teachers and





principals have limited power and the district is the one that should be held responsible for things like how many charter schools there are or where resources are being allocated. One of the things that was instrumental to the strike was the teachers' explanations of what was going on. To the district it appeared that the teachers were just asking for more money. Consequently, the teachers sent out videos on Facebook and set up a Twitter account, and the education association made a Facebook page to explain basic information about the teacher's strike. The public education campaign allowed the community to understand that the teachers had a two-year contract. Whereas the district would paint these events as a sudden thing, the teachers were able to correct that notion by showing how much planning and work had gone into creating that moment.

In their role as facilitators, teachers used everything from tweets to Facebook memes to explain how public officials were spending money. They explained the gaping discrepancies in how California spends money on its classrooms, and how Oakland spends its money in contrast. We call it a teachers' strike, but the teachers were trying to work in tandem with other school employees such as janitors and counselors because they also needed pay raises. For example, there are 22 nurses for every 37,000 students. It was really about schools as a whole, and those in the schools who were most overworked and underpaid. The district continues to argue that they do not have the finances to support students. Meanwhile, parents are upset at the quality of education. Parents start thinking that charter schools are better options, but they don't treat Black students any better. Charter schools also do not function better than public schools.

This is a moment for the political identity and the legacy of engagement in Oakland to potentially change. Public schools are getting whiter, wealthier, more privileged students. Charter schools make it more difficult for public schools to function. This is a result in a shift in the population and the type of class consciousness that exists in Oakland, and that is a result of many people in power who have made decisions for how Oakland should change.

A labor movement becomes vital because it's a demonstration that such an event will not happen without contention. People see and pay attention to the technocrat economy's attempt to change Oakland. The labor movement is an example of people's collective consciousness to fight back in a moment of vulnerability.

The vulnerability stems from the change in the political economy. A labor movement in an area that is becoming wealthier and less family friendly makes teachers vulnerable because they are still considered working class. Because there is so much competition with the charter schools, it makes it challenging to keep good teachers working at these public schools. Thus: "if I'm making \$40,000 at Oakland Technical High School (public school), why wouldn't I make \$80,000 at Head-Royce, a private school where tuition is \$42,900 per student?" One of the problems is that yet again, schools and teachers have a legacy within the political climate on the kinds of educational programs that exist. If you remove that, you extinguish what it means to be in or from Oakland.

## CONCLUSION

Using Gilmore's four categories of surplus as a guide to how crisis is created within capitalism, we can see that gentrification is the result of a regional crisis. The 2008 financial crisis was a turning point for the working-class community in Oakland. The solutions to a crisis are either to pull out of a region altogether and invest in other capacities or allow the state to step in and provide income supports.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Oakland, the economic structures were flooded and complete reimaged. It is important to remember that this moment in Oakland's history is a model that has been used before and will be used again. We can look to East Palo Alto, CA and New Orleans, LA as successful examples of how other models have operated.

In addition, it is important to define the teachers' strike we explored as a labor struggle. Labor struggles impact the political ideology through an understanding of action committed to the collective. These laborers are making a statement

for teachers and how the relationship with the community and the teachers needs to be handled. They are questioning whose responsibility it is to demonstrate: a) that teachers and students deserve better, and b) how important labor movements are within a working-class community where the working-class consciousness is so strong and central to the political identity.

Finally, I want to thank all of the people that allowed me to disrupt their days and nights with this case study, some of them speaking with me for hours at a time. I was allowed to argue, debate, reminisce and laugh with people I had never met around an issue we were all personally impacted by. The rich and vibrant conversations gave me all of the information I have written above and made helped me to remember the importance of solidarity through tough time. After all, that is how we have always survived through them.

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# Preservation and Neighborhood Change in Mantua, Philadelphia

BY JULIA COHEN

The neighborhood of Mantua in West Philadelphia is characterized by a strong commercial corridor, historic, but modestly sized homes, and a mix of longtime residents and newcomers, many of whom are students at nearby universities. High levels of vacancy resulting from decades of disinvestment and heightened by the early-2000s Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (NTI) have made Mantua particularly vulnerable to large-scale new development. Despite this high vacancy rate—nearly a quarter of properties in the neighborhood sit empty—steadfast advocates have worked and continue to work on behalf of their communities, turning to rezoning (to low density residential) to protect the neighborhood against speculative developers and the rising prices they bring with them.

This form of action, while not explicitly historic preservation in the formal sense, is at its heart an act of community preservation. By advocating for protections against rapid speculative development and maintaining an active voice in citywide planning conversations, Mantua residents are ensuring that they have a seat at the table. While Philadelphia's Zoning Board of Adjustment still approves close to 90 percent of requests for variances, even after a citywide remapping process, this change in Mantua's zoning has added a step to the process for developers, ensuring that registered community organizations have an opportunity to comment on proposals. While downzoning has historically been used as a tool for exclusionary development, in this case it has been used as a tool to counteract displacement of long-term residents in the face of speculative development.



Figure 1: Mantua and East Parkside are both located in West Philadelphia. Mantua appears as the orange dot and East Parkside as the purple dot on the overall map of the city. [Map created by Julia Cohen]

This case study relies on data collected from interviews with community leaders to shed light on the contexts and actors that have led Mantua residents to embrace rezoning as a way to preserve residential stability and community identity. In so doing, their efforts demonstrate the importance of steadfast community organizations to the successful implementation of mitigation plans and tools, particularly in the context of West Philadelphia.

## VACANCY AND DEMOLITION

Vacancy of urban land, in the form of empty lots following demolition, is a long-standing and widespread issue throughout Philadelphia. In addition to the physical impacts on the streetscape, communities throughout the U.S. are experiencing emotional trauma or “root shock” from the physical destruction of their neighborhood blocks by both private and public-led demolition.<sup>1</sup> Current practices of asset-based community development acknowledge this trauma and the other public health issues that vacant lots bring, but do so

without casting aside consideration of the crime, physical hazards, and public health issues fostered by deteriorating buildings left standing.

The Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, initiated in 2001 under Mayor John Street, aimed to consolidate and green vacant parcels across the city in order to encourage development. The program was not limited to the maintenance of vacant parcels, however. It also created them through building demolitions, under the premise that vacant and unmaintained buildings caused greater problems than would unbuilt land. The city, however, did not have enough funding to maintain all these unbuilt parcels, including both the preexisting ones as well as those resulting from NTI demolitions. After widely publicized protests in Mantua and Strawberry Mansion (another neighborhood that was an early recipient of NTI action), the city shifted its approach. After several modifications to the program, Mantua was selected once more as a focus area due to its strategic location and high vacancy rate.






Discussions of vacant land, particularly when that land is being used by residents, often center on the question of “use value” versus “exchange value.” Not only does the city lose tax revenue from the properties themselves (accounting for \$70 million in back property taxes, according to a 2010 study by Econsult and the University of Pennsylvania’s Institute of Urban Research), but vacancy also affects household wealth for nearby property owners and residents. The Philadelphia Land Bank was established in 2013 to ameliorate some of these effects by making it easier for developers to acquire consolidated parcels, although challenges in getting the Land Bank running have limited its impact. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society’s (PHS) LandCare program maintains about 40 percent of Mantua’s unbuilt parcels, while individuals and community associations maintain others as side yards or public spaces. This program is premised on the idea that if people see open space being cared for, they are more likely to invest in the area, whether in the form of time and care, or through development. This is a double-edged sword, however, as visible investment

ultimately makes these areas more attractive to developers, who can then acquire land maintained by community members who lack the protection afforded by formal ownership.

In theory, high levels of land vacancy should create opportunities for development with limited displacement, as unbuilt land can be turned into more “productive” uses. In Mantua, however, developers are often drawn to existing buildings that can be renovated for less money than if they were to build new. These developers are not generally renovating with legacy tenants’ needs in mind, however. When developers purchase occupied homes and board them up to lie vacant until the market becomes hotter, and then convert single-family homes into multiple units for university students, existing residents are pushed out. Additionally, the surrounding blocks are negatively affected by the newly created vacancy, followed by the disruption of construction, and finally by the increased population density and neighbors who are less likely to care for their units or invest in remaining long term.





In a city dominated by rowhouses—70 percent of Philadelphia’s housing stock is attached homes, and 75 percent of those are more than 50 years old—the impact of a single building demolition is great. Rowhouses share party walls, which, when exposed to the elements, deteriorate rapidly. These side walls were not intended to be open to the elements, and were often built using less durable brick than those of exterior walls. Neighboring structures also support each other, so the removal of a single structure creates stress on the remaining buildings on either side.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Mantua, which borders Drexel University and is a short walk to the transit hub of 30th Street Station, has experienced an influx of new residents and businesses in recent years. While many see these high levels of vacancy as opportunities for development without displacement, residents express a palpable concern about a loss of character of the neighborhood in which they live. Two commercial corridors—Haverford and Lancaster Avenues—extend through the neighborhood, with Lancaster cutting diagonally across West Philadelphia, acting as a zipper to connect the surrounding neighborhoods to one another. The 4200 block of Lancaster Avenue is notable for a larger number of black-owned businesses served by two strong business associations, compared to the more university-oriented establishments to the east.

The neighborhood is predominantly black, although this has been shifting in recent years. Compared to the neighboring East Parkside, where one in six residents has lived in their home since before 1980, Mantua has more of a mix of legacy residents and newcomers, with a sharp distinction between the areas to the east and west of 36th Street. Half of Mantua’s residents living east of 36th Street (closer to the Schuylkill River, area universities, and 30th Street Station) moved into their current homes after 2010, compared with one-third west of 36th. The eastern portion of the neighborhood is also whiter, reflecting shifting demographics through

gentrification. As recently as 2000, this part of the neighborhood was 93 percent black, with numbers comparable to the rest of Mantua and much of West Philadelphia at the time. These data reflect very real concerns that development is coupled with displacement and a changing neighborhood character.

Like many parts of Philadelphia, Mantua was deeply affected by the city’s urban renewal programs which began in the 1950s and lasted until the 1970s. The neighborhood continues to be targeted for more recent planning efforts, including the NTI program described above, funding from HUD’s Choice Neighborhoods initiative, an Obama-era Promise Zone designation, and, more recently, designation of both neighborhoods’ census tracts within the Federal Opportunity Zone program. Throughout this period, extending back to the mid-20th century, residents of Mantua have led major efforts to address issues that they saw in their respective neighborhoods and to advocate for their communities. This legacy of strong local leadership continues to this day, inspiring Mantua Civic Association President De’Wayne Drummond to come up with the motto “Plan or be planned for,” a statement that has resonated with other neighborhoods throughout the city.

## “PLAN OR BE PLANNED FOR”: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN WEST PHILADELPHIA

Several community groups have a presence in the geographically small area around the Lancaster Avenue commercial corridor. In addition to the Mantua Civic Association, the People’s Emergency Center and Mount Vernon Manor CDC serve as liaisons between residents and the city, institutions, and developers in Mantua. Civic associations also exist in each of the surrounding neighborhoods, including Belmont, Mill Creek, West Powelton, and Powelton Village. While these organizations often work together to achieve common goals, each has its own priorities and leadership, with some led by older legacy residents and others skewing



younger. Although Drexel University has tried to communicate with area civic associations in recent years, much of the development that concerns residents is driven by private developers, who see an opportunity in growing student enrollment. These developers are constructing four-story buildings with monthly rents surpassing \$2,000 for a three-bedroom unit.


Longstanding ideas of neighborhood boundaries mean that some pockets of land are not within any individual community organization's purview—this is less an issue of capacity, and more one of distinct neighborhood identities. In Mantua, these boundaries have shifted over time, particularly as more students have moved into the southeastern part of the neighborhood. While legacy residents see Spring Garden Street as Mantua's southern boundary, more recent newcomers might consider Haverford Avenue as the divider.

Shortly after the West Philadelphia Promise Zone designation in 2013, residents of Mantua began advocating for the neighborhood to be rezoned from multifamily to single-family residential. This change would require developers to request zoning variances to erect the three- and four-story apartment buildings that have become popular in recent years; nearly one in four units east of 36th Street in Mantua were built after the year 2000, compared to 11 percent west of 36th and in nearby East Parkside. Most of these new buildings are multi-unit. While the councilperson at the time was initially skeptical of rezoning, residents voted strongly in favor of it at a June 2016 community meeting. A year later (and after three years of discussion), the city council passed legislation to downzone the neighborhood, and it is now predominantly zoned for single-family residential.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION, COMMUNITY PRESERVATION, AND PUBLIC HISTORY

East Parkside and Powelton Village, to Mantua's immediate north and south, are nationally designated historic districts, and other locally- and nationally-designated districts in the area offer formal recognition of West Philadelphia's historic significance. Although Mantua has not experienced the same degree of formal historic preservation as its neighbors, it is similarly home to architecturally significant structures that typify early 20th century construction trends, albeit on a more modest scale than along Parkside Avenue or in the core of Powelton Village. In addition to the buildings themselves, events that have taken place in Mantua, as well as the institutions, activists, and artists that currently work within the neighborhood, play a central role in Mantua's identity and in the quality of life of its residents.

The West Philadelphia History Map (a joint initiative between People's Emergency Center and the Islamic Cultural Preservation and Information Council) documents sites of significance throughout this part of West Philadelphia. Divided into four broad categories of significance— Arts & Culture, Social Movements & Civil Rights, Infrastructure, and Physical Development—this crowdsourced resource serves as a repository for residents' memories and nationally recognized historic events. The map, which can be filtered by either theme or time, begins with sites associated with the Lenape, Iroquois, and Susquehannock people. Sections dedicated to the 20th and 21st centuries include the Negro League Ballpark at 44th and Parkside; the location of a speech by Martin Luther King in 1965, part of his "Freedom Now" tour; the headquarters of the black liberation group MOVE; and, into the present day, James Dupree's music studio on Haverford Avenue in Mantua.



While not explicitly about retaining historic homes, Mantua’s rezoning and the resulting community engagement and activism has had an effect on the landscape. More importantly, if successful, the rezoning will help preserve the quality of life for existing residents by offering some degree of accountability and oversight to real estate developers. Other communities are now looking to Mantua’s example, as private developers express interest in investing in neighborhoods without consulting residents about what they want or need. In summer 2018, for example, three neighborhood rezoning meetings took place in the neighborhood of East Parkside. Contrary to the popular conception of downzoning to keep people out, here it served as a tool for citizens to voice concerns about rising prices and potential displacement through a resident-led process.

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# On and Under Campus

## A Call for Commemoration to Combat the Erasure that Results from Displacement in St. Louis

BY TK SMITH

“They can’t figure out what to call black neighborhoods anymore, first it was a slum, then it was a ghetto, the inner city. They keep trying to come up with some euphemism to call black neighborhoods, now North St. Louis is a synonym for crime and poverty.”

—*Gwen Moore, Curator,  
Missouri History Museum*

Invoking the power of naming, Curator Gwen Moore gets to the heart of this case study. Narratives of African American spaces often reduce them to loaded terms like “ghetto,” “projects,” and “inner-city,” all of which have harmful connotations. These terms have been used to devalue black spaces and to justify the physical displacement of Black Bodies through policies, such as urban renewal, redlining, and prioritizing of private-sector investment at the expense of public benefit. “Black Bodies” is used to engage a contemporary trend in academia that works to combat the historical dehumanizing and reduction of black people to terms that characterize them as a homogenous and negligible mass. By highlighting the physicality of the blood and bone of a human body, black people are positioned as human, as well as a member of a racialized group and identity. In combating these negative connotations with alternative



and more appropriate terminology, we can more clearly see how black people are not only being forced or pressured into migration, but that forced migration is possible through a historical and systematic devaluing and reduction of the essence of who they are. When terms like “home,” “place of worship,” and “family-owned businesses” are reduced to “ghetto,” those who live there and their presence or connection to a space becomes trivial or insignificant in the face of what some would call “progress” or “urban renewal.”

The following narrative case study of the Midtown neighborhood in St. Louis, Missouri, focuses on displacement in relation to the concept of erasure. While displacement is understood as the forced expulsion of people from their space, erasure goes beyond this by severing all ties and claims to the space through a reshaping of the physical landscape and the metaphysical devaluing of the lives and the experiences of those displaced. Walking through Midtown today, it is impossible to physically discern that the neighborhood was once a thriving black community and a historical goldmine to both St. Louis and American history. Today, Midtown is dominated by Saint Louis University (SLU), a Jesuit institution that has both benefited from, and contributed to, the displacement of Black Bodies in Midtown for the sake of campus expansion.

This case study approaches the issue of erasure by illuminating the experiences of those displaced to better grasp at the severity of what was lost and what is at stake in the process of urban development. Oral histories from four historic events were collected for this study: the interment of Dred Scott, the destruction of Millcreek Valley, the destruction of Laclede Town, and Occupy SLU. The case study has been researched and written with the intention that these stories will provide context for the historical understandings of Midtown, how the space is publicly and privately remembered and commemorated, and how it should be understood today.

## BACKGROUND


Gentrification is a cycle that is constantly occurring in various phases and forms. In St. Louis, this cycle occurs so rapidly that one neighborhood can transform multiple times within the span of a lifetime. In this city nothing is permanent, especially for the poor and marginalized. Black people are arguably the most victimized and most vulnerable to displacement in St. Louis. Where one is born, where one grows, and even where one is interred can be easily uprooted or destroyed for the sake of urban renewal. Though displacement leads to the fragmenting of communities, the loss of security for those displaced, and the dissolving of culture, the greatest atrocity of displacement is erasure.

Midtown lies within the central corridor of the city of St. Louis. It is roughly bordered by Jefferson Avenue and Vandeventure Avenue east to west, and Delmar Avenue and Chouteau Avenue, north to south.

Relocating from its original downtown site in 1888, SLU established Saint Francis Xavier College Church and Dubourg Hall in Midtown. The university has played an essential role in the neighborhood's development, specifically during the terms of Father Paul Reinert (president from 1949 to 1974) and Father Lawrence Biondi (president from 1987 to 2013) when the campus expanded significantly. In 2017, under President Fred Pestello, the university in partnership with SSM Health created the Midtown Redevelopment Corporation.<sup>1</sup> The corporation has been granted, by Chapter 353 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri, authority over the development of 400 acres of “blighted” land.

What formation of this corporation reveals is that Saint Louis University is currently the main stakeholder in the development and economic prosperity of the Midtown neighborhood and has been for over half a century. Throughout the course of its history SLU has rezoned land plots, removed and renamed streets, gated vacant green plots, and branded the campus with decorative blue lights. The space is policed by SLU's armed security force, which allows and denies access to campus spaces.





This study claims that Saint Louis University, as an entity with the power to include and exclude in Midtown, has a moral responsibility to not only the future of the neighborhood, but to the retention of its history as well.

## BRIEF NARRATIVE HISTORIES

Four events were identified through archival research and selected both for their significance to black history and St. Louis history, and for the absence of evidence of these events in the physical urban landscape. This narrative is incomplete without the supplemental interviews that not only provide more in-depth information, but also add the personal and humanizing quality necessary to understand the true cost of displacement. The 12 individuals featured are either former residents of the areas, historians, or current SLU community members.

### The Interment of Dred Scott<sup>2</sup>

Dred Scott was buried where, I'm pretty sure, where one of the parking lots is. Right at Grand and Laclede. They talked about putting a marker up. They should put a marker up. There are a lot of things, that for whatever reason, are not talked about enough. Good and bad.

—*Dolores Byrnes, public historian*

Dred Scott, the man made famous for suing the state of Missouri for his freedom, was originally buried at Wesleyan Cemetery in St. Louis. This 12.75-acre cemetery was established in 1847 by the Centenary Methodist Church and held more than 2,400 Black Bodies. Due to urban expansion encroaching on the grounds, the cemetery association moved the cemetery to another urban location, before eventually being moved out of the city all together. Scott was buried near Grand Avenue and Laclede Avenue, which is now occupied by SLU's Laclede garages. In 1867, as

the cemetery was being relocated, Scott's body was recovered and moved to Calvary Cemetery in northern St. Louis.


### The Destruction of Mill Creek Valley<sup>3</sup>

When the university acquired this property back in 1960, I wasn't here when it happened, but all those buildings were torn down and obviously there may not have been 10,000 people in this area, but people were living there, those were their homes.

—*John Wade, SLU archivist*

Mill Creek Valley was a 454-acre neighborhood located roughly from Grand Avenue eastward to Jefferson Boulevard. The community in Mill Creek Valley is remembered in polarized ways. Those who lived and worked there called it a tight-knit, black community, while news publications and historical texts refer to it as a "rat-infested slum." Mill Creek Valley was once a predominantly white neighborhood, which accounts for its large, brick single-family homes. White flight and industrialization pushed white families west. Black residents were funneled into the area through restrictive real-estate practices, eventually allowing the neighborhood to become a predominantly black community.

The community consisted of middle-class, working-class, and poor black families and boasted a prominent commercial district. Former resident of Mill Creek Valley, Gwen Moore, refers to the area as the "commercial center of black St. Louis." The neighborhood held the People's Finance Building, a multi-use commercial building that housed offices for the St. Louis Argus and the St. Louis American newspapers, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the office of the famous Judge Nathan B. Young, as well as other prominent black doctors, lawyers, and professionals. Mill Creek was the home of St. Paul's AME church, which was well known for being financed exclusively by the black community.



In 1954, Mayor Raymond Tucker proposed a publicly funded urban renewal project that would destroy all commercial buildings and 5,600 homes in Mill Creek. The destruction of the neighborhood was justified with a litany of words often used to describe black spaces: “eyesore,” “crime-filled,” and “unlivable.” It is also far from a coincidence that this black neighborhood existed in the central corridor of the city; a prime location for lucrative new development. By 1959, work began evacuating families from their homes. The St. Louis NAACP referred to this action as the “urban renewal Negro removal.” The plan did not call for resettling existing residents in a new neighborhood—the plan was permanent displacement. At best, residents were given Section 8 vouchers to subsidize rentals in other neighborhoods, but this approach did not alleviate the trauma of having one’s neighborhood erased and community fractured.

Of the 5,000 plus structures that once existed in Mill Creek Valley, only two remain: the original Vashon High School (now Harris-Stowe State University), and the Berea Church,<sup>4</sup> (now Il Monastero of Saint Louis University). In 1959, Saint Louis University purchased 20 acres of the former Mill Creek Valley with money donated to the university by the daughter of Confederate General Daniel M. Frost.<sup>5</sup> The university has since restricted lots, renamed and restructured streets, and rebranded Mill Creek Valley out of existence.

## The Destruction of Laclede Town<sup>6</sup>

I literally grew up from 5 years old to my early 20s in Laclede Town...I’m telling you what I know, I love my neighborhood, I love it. I love it to the point that if it was still there today, because we had such a sense of community, I would raise my children there.

*—Alois Bell, former resident of Laclede Town*

Built in 1964, Laclede Town was a federally funded housing complex built on a large tract of land left after Saint Louis University bought the adjacent section of the former Mill Creek Valley. It was built in part as restitution for the housing shortage and displacement that occurred when Mill Creek Valley was razed. Laclede Town was modeled more like a suburb, with 1,000 wood-framed condominiums that were no more than three stories high. Each complex had a pool, security, landscaping, and other amenities. Those who knew it in its glory days often described the project as a “Utopia.”

Laclede Town was managed by Jerry Berger. What made the project unique was Berger’s alleged illegal screening process for admission. Although biased, admissions were based upon a progressive objective to create a community of families that varied by race, income, and marital status. Though housing was occupied mostly by middle-class white families, black families also made up a sizable portion of the project. Laclede Town also became known for its eclectic mix of artist, professor, student, and activist residents. For the years that Berger was allegedly able to keep up his illegal discriminatory practice, Laclede Town was seen as a success.<sup>7</sup>

In 1978, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) put a stop to Berger’s screening process, the project was then required to only serve families that were experiencing poverty. In turn, the community lost much of the economic, cultural, and racial diversity it was praised for. Falling into the same “semantic cage” as Mill Creek Valley and other black spaces, the now majority black housing project was labeled “unfit” and “dangerous,” and in 1995 it was evacuated and destroyed. Those that fled and those that were displaced relocated across various parts of the St. Louis metropolitan area, further contributing to the structured segregation of other St. Louis neighborhoods. The scattered members of this neighborhood still meet to this day and celebrate their “utopia” once a year in August.



## Occupy SLU<sup>8</sup>

In October 2014, a large group of protesters occupied Saint Louis University's campus for six days in response to the deaths of Michael Brown, Jr., in Ferguson, Missouri, and Vonderrit Myers, Jr., in South City, a St. Louis neighborhood. In a convergence of community concerns, the protesters demanded that the university respond directly to what was happening around it. The results were the Clock Tower Accords,<sup>9</sup> a community benefit agreement created through collaboration between the SLU administration, grassroots organizers, and the protestors to better improve the university's relationship with the greater St. Louis community. The agreement included the construction of a community center, a K-12 bridge program for local, predominantly black public schools, and an increase of black faculty on campus. This was a pivotal moment in the history of the university and the neighborhood. If the accords were not realized, the outcome would be maintenance of the status quo: an urban university that isolates itself from responsibility to the generations of residents whose lives exist on and under the expanding campus. Simultaneously, it would reveal the powerlessness of the community to resist the forces of the university.

## NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The collected research and narratives reveal that there is power in remembering and power in erasure. Universities are highly influential entities with the resources to create change. This case study is not only concerned with how SLU has affected Midtown in the past, but also with the landscape and community that SLU continues to create with its power. SLU could use its authority to create affordable housing, commercial and community spaces for poor and working-class families to once again return to and inhabit the space. As that seems unlikely, a step toward reconciliation may be in interpretation and commemoration. Although both actions do not

prevent displacement and they won't carry the same metaphysical weight as if those displaced had been valued all along, they do help in returning value to the space by preventing the erasure of history and culture.

There is no one proper way to commemorate what was lost in displacement. Commemoration of a displaced people, especially black people, cannot be as passive as a fixed plaque or a statue. Commemorative efforts must be something dynamic that can be carried along with the poor and marginalized as they are displaced. Commemoration must come in a form that cannot be commodified or sold. An example could be an annual university-sponsored conference on displacement and historic preservation that centers on oral history and traditions from those who have lived through those processes. In whatever ways, physical or metaphysical that are developed to commemorate, it must be a communal conversation, according to Dr. Jonathan Smith, vice president for diversity and inclusion. Many voices must be elevated to do the history and the land its due justice.

This study is intended to be used as a model that can be applied to several neighborhoods in St. Louis to further understandings of the processes of displacement and its effect on those displaced. Reclaiming the value of black people, as people, is essential in the valuing of their contribution to American culture and history, as well as understanding their claim to physical spaces. It is easy to displace people when their lives, in any space, are not written, recorded, and celebrated as something of value. The terms used to destroy black spaces also do the work of destroying Black Bodies. Imagine the great loss when a young black person travels through Midtown and does not see themselves in the space of such notable St. Louis black history.

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**TK SMITH** is a Philadelphia based writer, art critic, and curator. He is a PhD candidate in the American Civilization Program at the University of Delaware. Smith received his MA in American Studies and his BA in English and African American Studies from Saint Louis University. The intention with this research project is to illuminate the history and experiences of African American displacement in St. Louis by means of oral history, material culture, and spatial analysis. By analyzing the physical and visual composition of St. Louis and the racialized demarking of space, the work will reveal a culture dependent on cycles of divestment and investment, dilapidation and gentrification, and the careless relocation of Black bodies.

# Between 1990-2000, Over 7,000 African Americans Left Shaw: Why?


BY THEODORE WILHITE

In the ten-year period following the designation of the Shaw neighborhood as a historic district, Shaw lost more than 53% of its African American residents and witnessed a 500% increase of new white residents according to the 2000 and 2010 censuses. A qualitative assessment was conducted to understand the context to the data that is so jarring in black and white. The individuals interviewed represented Shaw residents between 2000 and 2010, for purposes of this analysis: a male teenager<sup>1</sup>; the president of a tenant association<sup>2</sup>; the D.C. Director of the Office of Planning<sup>3</sup>; a community organizer<sup>4</sup>; a female small business owner<sup>5</sup>; a community elected official<sup>6</sup>, and an acclaimed writer and an academic who has researched and written on the history of Washington, D.C.<sup>7</sup> The individuals were all asked “What happened?” Each individual account offers a slightly different take on the affects and effects experienced in Shaw within just a decade.

## BACKGROUND

The Washington, D.C. neighborhood of Shaw has long been a central part of the city both geographically and culturally. At the turn of the twentieth century, D.C. had the largest concentration of African Americans of any urban neighborhood in the country.<sup>8</sup> U Street, Shaw’s main thoroughfare, was known as “Black Broadway” in the 1920s and 1930s serving as a thriving center of African-American culture and creativity.<sup>9</sup> To many, Shaw was an “oasis of innovation in a city scarred by Jim Crow in the late-19th and early-20th centuries.”<sup>10</sup> In the late sixties after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., like black communities across the nation, Shaw reached its boiling point with riots that brought the community to its knees.<sup>11</sup>





By the 1990s Shaw, like most of the city, would never fully recover from the riots. Congress had charged that government financial and management problems adversely affected the long-term economic health of the District and was the cause for the migration of residents and businesses out of the city, and for the failure to attract new residents and businesses.<sup>12</sup> When the city's deficit reached over \$722 million, Congress responded with the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority Act.<sup>13</sup> Subsequent actions were taken by the District's government to increase its tax base.<sup>14</sup> The city prioritized addressing blight.<sup>15</sup>

In 2001, the D.C. Abatement and Condemnation of Nuisance Properties Omnibus Amendment Act of 2000 was signed into law, amending the D.C. Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978 that granted authority to the Mayor to take properties from non-compliant homeowners. In an effort to mitigate the displacement of low-income homeowners, the legislation provided for an affordable tax credit, aimed at assisting low-income residents to prevent housing insecurity. The Council would later determine that it was too onerous upon low income residents, after the comprehensive analysis of historic housing rehabilitation strategies conducted in 2004 for the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).<sup>16</sup> The SHPO analysis concluded that the program as originally designed is overly complex and ineffective at meeting the needs of its intended beneficiaries, who are low-income homeowners. In an attempt to understand the impact of historic preservation on Shaw, interviews were conducted with government officials, current and displaced residents, and an academic historian who has researched and wrote extensively on Washington, D.C.


## CITY'S FAILURE TO ADDRESS CRIME AND BLIGHT: 1970-90s

*Theodosius "Tessy" Robinson* has been a Shaw resident since early 1970's. President of the Lincoln-Westmoreland Tenant Association

According to Tessy Robinson, the progression of drugs and violence started being introduced into her community as early as the 1970's. However, it reached its peak in the late 1980's through 1990's.<sup>17</sup> By the time violence peaked in Shaw, Robinson had witnessed a new generation that was more callous than generations prior. She recalled a time where young drug dealers robbed old drug dealers at gun point. Robinson sympathized with the young men who resorted to drugs. She recalls a time when, "... many of the young men were graduating from high school, and there were not opportunities nor training available for employment." Determined to not be pushed out of their community and without the support of the District Metropolitan Police Department, Tessy and other residents in Shaw organized orange hat patrols to let those who were participating in illicit activities know that the residents were watching and did not want their presence in their community. Tessy mentioned no nostalgia for a once prosperous African American community in Shaw. Instead, she reminisced around organizing to expel drugs and violence.

## HOUSING PRODUCTION TRUST FUND: 1990S

*Harold Valentine* has been a Shaw resident since 1978. Tri-Pod Committee and Shaw Community Development Fund Co-Chair of Economic, Housing and Safety Committees



Harold Valentine's work during the 1990s in Shaw alongside the United Planning Organization identified more than 300 abandoned or vacant houses in Shaw. His work would result in the creation of the city's Housing Production Trust Fund (HPTF).<sup>18</sup> At the time it had no money and was a fund only in name, but today it has \$110 million. The building Valentine now lives in, is the last building used to leverage HPTF to stabilize senior housing in Shaw.

Valentine argues that if not for the creation of the fund, gentrification would have never started. Creditworthiness was the bottom line. Many of the low-income residents could not qualify for the programs to maintain housing in Shaw. "It wasn't like when Barry started with the housing, I know three or four people who got their home for nothing."<sup>19</sup> This time things were different according to Valentine. "The people who knew or was able to read through legal documents got it. However, the ones without credit or patience to get over the hurdles were excluded on sight."<sup>20</sup> Valentine feels that once money was put in HPTF, everyone wanted to live in Shaw. The change occurred so quickly because the loans were fast tracked by whatever political ties you had to the D.C.'s Department of Housing and Community Development.

## D.C.'S SUBWAY, NOT HISTORIC PRESERVATION, CAUSED RESIDENTS TO BE DISPLACED: 1991

*Kymone Freeman* was a Shaw resident as a teenager in 1989 before being displaced in the nineties. Founder, We Act Radio

According to Kymone Freeman, "the neighborhood started to change, almost like clockwork as soon as the Shaw metro station opened. Rent started to explode, people started to be displaced, invaders took over our communities, dog parks appeared."<sup>21</sup>


Freeman's anger and frustration was unmistakable in the interview; a frustration with which many native African Americans can relate.

"Like a magic wand was waved and things just got better as far as the quality of life, but things just got harder with the cost of life. The city is a developer's dream, a native's nightmare, and a settler's orgy. They get whatever they want. Dog Park? Bike lane? You wanna bring your dog into the restaurant and sit him next to you and feed him? Hell, you can do what you want. But poor blacks can't stay where you are. Shaw is a microcosm of D.C. In 1970 Shaw was 90% black. I was born in 1970 and have seen the dissolving of chocolate city into chocolate chips. But it is not over. East of the River is still Chocolate City and we going to have to put our chips together."<sup>22</sup> Freeman's assertion that public transportation had a direct nexus with sky rocketing rental prices is consistent with other reports of the effect of the metro's green on affordable housing. In 2012, WAMU's Martin Di Caro reported on the changes that have taken place in Columbia Heights; experts he spoke to said that the 20010 Zip code, which includes Columbia Heights, was one of the country's gentrifying neighborhoods.<sup>23</sup> More recently, Governing magazine mapped gentrifying Census tracts in D.C. — almost all of which were along the Green Line corridor.<sup>24</sup> In large part, this development was the point of the Green Line.<sup>25</sup>

## RACE FRONT AND CENTER IN THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION DEBATE: 1999

*Alexander Padro* has been a homeowner in Shaw since 1997. Executive Director, Shaw Main Streets and Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner since 2001

Alexander Padro stated that when he first moved to Shaw in the 1990s, the city's Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans and other officials



were planning to build the new convention center in Shaw.<sup>26</sup> The construction of the new Convention Center triggered the National Preservation Act's Section 106 federal regulations. Section 106 requires that federally-funded projects be analyzed to determine if the project will have any adverse effects on historic resources and requires Federal agencies to seek and consider the public's views at every stage of the review process. Motivated by the revenues the new convention center would bring, the city officials knew it would also need community support and brought in consultants to meet with residents during the environmental review process. This was not without conflict, though. After the consultants proposed to name the historic area Mount Vernon West, "all hell broke loose," says Padro. Padro would subsequently research and draft an argument for the Shaw Historic District. With Padro's leadership, the residents of Shaw won over the city's historic review board. As the District of Columbia does not have neighborhoods, so many communities took their names from the African American school districts. Shaw earned its name from Shaw Junior High School and residents felt a name change would be erasure of their contributions as African Americans to the community.

## BLACK OWNED BUSINESSES ARE NOT COUNTED IN SHAW: 1990 - PRESENT

*Wanda Henderson* has been a resident in neighboring Ledroit Park for 50 years. Owner, Wanda's on 7th on since 1997

Economic vitality is critical for African American communities to survive the fast changes occurring in the urban landscape. Henderson represents a demographic that is unaccounted for by data collected in the census. Henderson is a black business owner who somehow has thwarted off displacement. When she first relocated her

salon and barbershop from a different location in Shaw, she felt that she, "could feel a presence, although it was abandoned." Henderson remained in the location through the years, but the 11 other black-owned business that shared the block with her were not able to survive. The D.C. State Data Center does not track data about the race of business owners in the District of Columbia according to its Director Dr. Joy Phillips. Using the statistics of Henderson's experience on her block, only one of 11 black owned businesses were able to survive historic designation.

Henderson said, "after being in the shop a year the property was approached by developers. 'You'll be out in 6 months,' was heard often, and not always by the most likely suspects." Henderson said threats didn't always come from outsiders, but sometimes even members of her own community. Small business owners like Wanda Henderson were priced out. The value of the building that housed Henderson's salon went from \$200,000 to \$1.3 million overnight. Her pro bono attorney supported her with legal assistance in for negotiating with developers, which lasted eight years. After Henderson signed what she described as a "very harsh lease" with her salon building's new owners, they then provided another lease. The terms of the original lease required Henderson to pay more than originally bargained for, with a build-out being provided by developers, and then the second lease provided only for the delivery of four walls. However, this time Henderson would have to do the electric and gas water lines too. By this time, Henderson had already invested \$100,000 when she first became the tenant of the abandoned and blighted property. Now, with the redevelopment, Henderson was forced to invest another \$180,000. She alleges that she was advised to sign over her first right of refusal without a lease in hand. The District of Columbia incentivized and extended tax credits to white developers to build in the historically Black neighborhood of Shaw, but business owners like Henderson received no assistance and were met with added hardships when they attempted to remain during and after Shaw's revitalization.<sup>27</sup>



## HISTORIC PRESERVATION BENEFITED SHAW, A NEIGHBORHOOD IN DECLINE: 2000 – 2015

*Harriet Tregoning* has been a resident of the District for more than 25 years. Director of the District of Columbia's Office of Planning from 2007-2014

Harriet Tregoning, the Director of D.C.'s Office of Planning explained that in many D.C. neighborhoods, historic preservation is used to prevent change and sometimes creates the change. In Tregoning's opinion, the problem arises when the city does not look at trends of where they are approving and disapproving historic districts, nor its impact on the existing community. Tregoning believes that for Shaw, historic preservation played a positive role when the neighborhood was declining. Tregoning asserted that, "the historic designation of neighborhoods has some benefits when the neighborhood is in decline by codifying that the place is special. When what's special is written on the bones of the building it is more likely that people would want to stay even in a declining neighborhood because of the attraction to architecture and cohesive strong sense of place."<sup>28</sup>

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION IS A THREAT TO BLACK CULTURE: PRESENT


*George Derek Musgrove, Ph.D.* moved to Shaw in the late 1990s and has been a resident of D.C. since. Associate Professor of History and Affiliate Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Maryland Baltimore County and best-selling author of

## "Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital"

George Derek Musgrove, academic, historian and best-selling author of "Chocolate City" described a phenomenon in Georgetown and Capitol Hill, where historic preservation policy caused gentrification. According to Musgrove, the newcomers to historically African American neighborhoods were most often the white middle-class looking to buy low-priced and architecturally beautiful houses in previously "undiscovered" places. "Intentional or not, newcomers' actions caused the homes of long-term African American residents to become unaffordable," says Musgrove. "This is concerning considering the historical and cultural significance of the neighborhood to black people."

Today, Musgrove is not certain why the general association between historic preservation and gentrification is not as strong. He reasons that, "the gentrifiers are not just well-to-do white people that have fell in love with an old community. The gentrifiers today are a mishmash of well-to-do white people who fell in love with a community and big developers. When it comes down to it," Musgrove points out, "the developers set an agenda that doesn't work for preservationists. Preservationists look at Shaw and say, 'okay, we gotta keep all these 3 or 4 story row houses.' And developers are like, 'yeah, if you knock down this whole block, I can make \$10 million. And if you let me pop the top, I can make another \$200,000.' That's why Shaw is losing its character!"

Musgrove is describing a controversial trend among some of small developers in D.C. to renovate narrow row houses by adding on top up to five stories. "Those pop-ups are developers. They are small time developers. Now they are coming to other neighborhoods in D.C. They're looking at zoning and realizing that all two stories apartment buildings on Georgia Avenue can go up to 5 stories without a zoning change, so they are. Preservationists are saying, 'that's terrible, stop. We



want neighborhood to look like it did in the 20's sans the covenants.' So, I think there is a moment where preservation and gentrification are the same thing, I think that moment has passed."

## CONCLUSION

It is worth noting that far more historically significant than the 1890 Victorian styled home at 1326 R Street, NW, is the importance of the activities that occurred therein by longtime resident Alain Leroy Locke, the first African American Rhode Scholar. In 1912, he started to serve as professor and eventually the Dean of Howard University's School of Philosophy for more than 40 years while calling Shaw home. Alain Locke was a stimulus to the pulse of the Negro World. He first recognized the beating of the pulse in Harlem around 1926. However, he was also able to recognize the beat from his lived experiences in Shaw. Shaw is, and has always been, more than just 19th century framed homes and mansard roofs, the community is representative and indicative of the state of African Americans in our country. Shaw, unlike many of the city's other historically African American communities that received historic designations, has been successful in preserving some of its black residents, but there may be cause for alarm with the upcoming 2020 census if displacement continues to occur at the rate from the prior decade.

Along with the disappearance of Black people in the community, there has been erasure of the cultural activities that once defined not just the community, but also an era in America. Decades after the rise and fall of Howard Theatre, the first in the nation to cater to African Americans, residents in the community came together over parades and street festivals. Shaw was once the home of D.C.'s Caribbean Carnival and Georgia Avenue Day parade, both of which came to an end prior to 2010 due to public safety concerns. The legendary actor and playwright Ossie Davis once told Kymone Freeman, "... we have always been in conflict. And there comes a time when we must declare to the world that we shall not be moved." All who have historical ties to Shaw stand strong against the

many forces pushing long-term residents out of the neighborhood- and there are many. A major issue here is affordability and the misappropriation of that term based on the statistics of income that don't reflect the experiences of real people. \$1 million is affordable to someone.

By no means should the take away from this case study be that Shaw makes a case for preservation's ability to preserve community and people. Considering the number of African Americans in Shaw today are not vested, but at the mercy of the various institutions that hold title to the land. Instead it's proffered that there should be need for concern. This case study does show that there is hope in the work between public and private partnerships. It also reveals that data needs to be collected on the number of black businesses that exist in communities, and to explore if there are any causal relationships between public policies, like historic preservation, and their success. The African American pulse in Shaw is growing weak, but maybe there is another migration of African Americans that will return the life, sounds and culture of our lived experience in the community that was born out of the hope of freedmen.



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